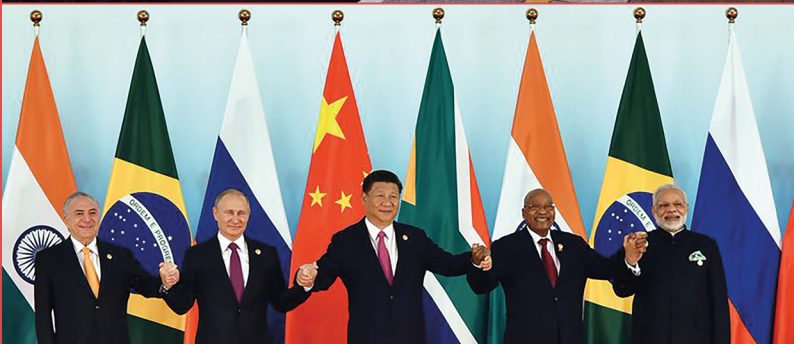


UPSC MONTHLY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER-2017



Section 375 of IPC

Plea against IPC clause on age of sexual consent.

Saubhagya

Shedding light on the ambitious 'Electricity for All' Scheme.

BRICS Summit

Lashkar and Jaish declared as terror groups.

India-Japan Ties

Fly on a bullet train from Mumbai.

Rohingya's

Refugees or Illegal Immigrants?

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



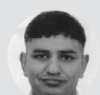
Rishav
Kumar Jha
Rank-162



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 Rathi



Rank 46
Udita Singh

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POLITY

1. Parents are behind child marriages: SC

In News:

Supreme Court observations:

- It was unfortunate to note that parents drive their minor children into marriage
- At least one in three marriages in rural areas involve girl children below the age of 18.

Petition filed by NGO Independent Thought:

- **Contention:** Petition challenges the Exception 2 to Section 375 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code, which permits "intrusive sexual intercourse with a girl child aged between 15 and 18 only on the ground that she is married."
- The Exception is part of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 and is contrary to the anti-child sex abuse law, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (POCSO).
- **Key stats:** As per the Fourth National Family Health Survey of 2015-16, there are 26.8% of brides in the country who were married below the age of 18.

2. 'Medical boards proposed to hear abortion pleas'

Context:

- Supreme Court directive: appoint permanent medical boards to provide women, especially rape survivors, urgent access to medical care and to consider their requests for abortion.

In news:

- Government informed Supreme Court: that it has written to States and Union Territories about the court's suggestion.

Basic Information:

What is MTP Act, 1971?

- Abortion in India is legal only up to twenty weeks of pregnancy under specific conditions and situations.
- One, the continuance of the pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or of grave injury of physical or mental health, or
- Two, there is a substantial risk that if the child were born, it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

What the draft MTP bill 2014 provides?

- The draft MTP increased the legal limit for abortion from 20 weeks to 24 weeks.
- It provides for abortion beyond 24 weeks under defined conditions.

- The Bill amends Section 3 of the 1971 Act to provide that "the length of pregnancy shall not apply" in a decision to abort a foetus diagnosed with "substantial foetal abnormalities" or if it is "alleged by the pregnant woman to have been caused by rape".
- Under the 1971 Act, even pregnant rape victims cannot abort after 20 weeks, compelling them to move court.
- It allows a woman to take an independent decision in consultation with a registered health-care provider.
- It also takes into account the reality of a massive shortage of both doctors and trained midwives, and seeks to allow Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha practitioners to carry out abortions.

Why is it essential to change the MTP law?

- Foetal abnormalities show up only by 18 weeks, so just a two-week window after that is too small for the would-be parents to take the difficult call on whether to keep their baby.
- Even for the medical practitioner, this window is too small to exhaust all possible options before advising the patient.
- There is an urgent need to empower women with sexual rights, legal protection against sex crimes and sex choices both in their own interest and for the sake of reducing the fertility rate as a whole.
- The lack of legal approval moves abortion to underground and they are done in unhygienic conditions by untrained, thus, putting thousands of women at risk.

3. Order on net neutrality in a month

In News:

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is likely to come out with its recommendations on the long-pending controversial issue of net neutrality in a month's time.
- The issue has been debated since early 2015 in India.
- What is net neutrality? Net Neutrality is the principle that service providers should treat all data on the Internet equally, and not discriminate or charge differently by user, content, site, platform, or application.
- Demanding that the same rule should apply for the same services, telecom operators have reasoned that operators are required to ensure service quality and pay levies to the government, while no such rules are applicable on Internet-based calling applications such as Whatsapp and Skype.
- After a series of consultation papers on related topics such as over-the-top service providers and differential pricing of data services, TRAI had released a consultation paper on 'Net neutrality'

- The regulator had last year barred telecom service providers from charging differential rates for data services, effectively prohibiting Facebook's Free Basics and Airtel Zero platform.

4. HC puts Haryana quota law in abeyance till March

In News:

- The Punjab and Haryana High Court stayed the implementation of a Haryana law providing reservation to Jats and five other communities, till March next year.
- Court also directed the State Backward Classes Commission to determine the quota in government jobs and education institutions to be given to these communities after studying relevant data and submit a report by March 2018.

Basic Information:

National Commission for Backward Classes:

- National Commission for Backward Classes is under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- It was constituted pursuant to the provisions of the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993.

Constitutional status:

- In 2017, a bill seeking to grant constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes is scheduled to be passed in Parliament. The bill was passed by Lok Sabha in April 2017 and is waiting for the assent of the Rajya Sabha. The NCBC Bill, passed by Lok Sabha in 2017, will insert Article 338B.

Indra Sawhney & Ors. Vs. Union of India:

- The commission was the outcome of Indra Sawhney & Ors. Vs. Union of India. The Supreme Court of India in its Judgement—directed the Government of India, State Governments and Union Territory Administrations to constitute a permanent body in the nature of a Commission or Tribunal for entertaining, examining and recommending upon requests for inclusion and complaints of over-inclusion and under-inclusion in the list of OBCs. The Supreme Court held that the Constitution recognised only social and educational — and not economic — backwardness.

Composition: The Act provides that the Commission shall consist of five Members:

- A Chairperson who is or has been a judge of the Supreme Court or of a High Court; a social scientist; two persons who have special knowledge in matters relating to backward classes; and a Member-Secretary, who is or has been an officer of the Central Government in the rank of a Secretary to the Government of India. Their term is of Three years.

Functions:

- The commission considers inclusions in and exclusions from the lists of communities notified as backward for the purpose of job reservations and tenders the needful advice to the Central Government

- National Commission for Backward Classes has not yet been empowered to look into the grievances of persons of Other Backward Classes.

5. Expedite trial in gang rape case, says SC

In News:

- **The Supreme Court order:** trial against Greyhound police force personnel allegedly involved in the gang rape of 11 women belonging to a vulnerable Adivasi tribe in Visakhapatnam be expedited and concluded in six months.
- **Fact:** the criminal trial had not moved in the past one decade (the victims have been waiting for justice since 2007).

Basic Information:

- **Greyhound police force:** GreyHounds is a special force of the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states which undertakes high risk operations against Naxalite terrorists.

6. Central panel says states don't need to hike NREG pay to match minimum wage

In News:

- The panel for revision of wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has recommended that there is no need to ensure parity with minimum wages paid by various states
- It states that wages under the rural employment guarantee scheme were last aligned to minimum wages in 2009, and that "there is no compelling reason to align MGNREGA and states minimum wages again".
- The panel had earlier found that MGNREGA wages were lower than the minimum agricultural wages paid in 17 states and Union Territories
- In 2014, a seven-member expert committee, headed by Professor Mahendra Dev, had held that MGNREGA workers should be paid at least the minimum wages paid to agricultural workers in the states, if not more, to meet basic needs.
- The report, was accepted by MoRD but rejected by the Finance Ministry citing the fiscal burden involved.
- The ministry panel has agreed to the 2nd recommendation of the Mahendra Dev committee, that the Consumer Price Index for Rural (CPI-R), which reflects the present consumption pattern, should be the basis for annual revision of MGNREGA wage rates, and not CPI- Agricultural Labourers (CPI-AL), which is based on the consumption pattern of 1983

Divergence in pay:

- There has been a divergence because several states have arbitrarily increased their minimum wages without following any scientific principles.
- There is no reason why the Centre should go by that
- MGNREGA budget and Wage revision

- Union government had claimed that this year's MGNREGA budget of Rs 48,000 crore is the highest ever.
- But the wage revision this year was at a mere 2.7 percent, the lowest in the scheme's ten-year legacy leading to a mere Rs 1-3 per day hike in several states.
- The MGNREGA wages are far lower than minimum wages in states such as Karnataka, Punjab, West Bengal, Haryana, and Jharkhand.

7. SC to hear Rohingya plea for help

Context:

- Indian government's proposal to deport 40,000-strong Rohingya Muslim refugee community back to their native Myanmar, where discrimination and possibly summary executions await them.
- An urgent plea was made by two Rohingya Muslim immigrants against the government's proposed move.

In news:

- The Supreme Court has agreed to hear the plea.

Petitioners contention:

- The Centre's move to deport them violated the constitutional guarantee that the Indian state should "protect the life and liberty of every human being, whether citizen or not."
- The proposed deportation is contrary to the constitutional protections of Article 14 (equality), Article 21 (right to life) and Article 51(c) (respect for international law and treaty obligations) of the Constitution.

Basic Information:

- **Article 14:** Equality before law:
- The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
- **Article 21:** Protection of life and personal liberty:
- No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law
- **Article 51:** Promotion of international peace and security

The State shall endeavour to

- Promote international peace and security;
- Maintain just and honourable relations between nations;
- Foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another; and encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration.

8. An article of faith

Context:

- **Dogras community**, feel challenged by the overt and covert attempts to remove Article 35A of the Constitution
- There is a strong apprehension that its repeal will lead to the economic deprivation and erosion of cultural identity of the Dogras.

Article 35A- Background

- Article 35A of the Indian Constitution is an article that empowers the Jammu and Kashmir state's legislature to define "permanent residents" of the state and provide special rights and privileges to those permanent residents.
- It is more relevant for the Duggar region of Jammu than Kashmir and Ladakh
- On the plea of the Dogra Pratinidhi Sabha and Kashmiri Pandit Sabha, the Maharaja sanctioned laws to safeguard the interests of his subjects, especially the Dogras of Jammu
- It is to shield them from domination by elite and affluent non-state subjects, mostly from neighbouring Punjab.
- The laws have withstood for the past 90 years and hugely helped in preserving the identity and interests of the Dogras.
- Article 35A derives its strength from the State Subject Laws of 1927

Reasons against repealing Article 35A:

- It will lead to destroying the Duggar ethos and pride but also subjugating Dogras to outside economic dominance
- It is argued that repealing Article 35A will give a boost to development in Jammu and Kashmir
- But geographical location of the state, a limited market, manufacturing costs and the volatile law and order situation are the real impediments to the growth of industry in the region.
- This was done to safeguard the rights and guarantee the distinct identity of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Scrapping Article 35A, hence, will shake the very foundation of this relationship.
- Professional academic courses will become more competitive and difficult.
- The local youth will be deprived of the concessions in recruitment in the security forces and denied scholarships and other financial assistance
- The influx of "non-subjects", in the absence of the repeal of Article 35A, will put immense pressure on landholdings
- Farm activity will reduce and farmers will be rendered jobless.
- Work opportunities for the local skilled and unskilled labour will shrink.

- Large migrant labour is likely to acquire land and build houses if residency restrictions under Article 35A go.

Way forward

- The government must carry out a verification of state subjects and identify those who have managed to become permanent residents through dubious means.
- Once identified, such people should be prosecuted as per the law and deported from the state.

9. Haryana targets 2 lakh jobs for youth under 'Saksham Yojana'

In News:

- The Haryana State government has set a target to provide employment to two lakh youth in the State under the 'Saksham Yojana'.
- Officials to recruit youth under the Yojana for various departments where there was shortage of employees.

Other areas of opportunity:

- The youth should also be provided job opportunities in industrial units.
- There was a new plan to establish a trauma centre at every 60 km to provide instant medical facilities to those injured in road accidents on national highways.

Basic Information:

'Saksham Yojana':

- **Target group:** Educated unemployed youth.
- Under this scheme Rs.9000 per month will be offered for working 100 hours a month. It is mandatory to register online to start taking the benefits.

Eligible criteria:

- Applicant should be domicile of Haryana
- Applicant should be registered in the Employment Exchange
- Applicant should be post graduate
- Age: between 21 to 35 years
- Annual family income: less than Rs. 3 lakh per annum.
- The benefit of the scheme will be given for max of 3 years
- Applicant should register online for this scheme

10. Bengal mulling English medium sections in government schools

In News:

- The West Bengal government is considering a proposal to introduce separate English medium sections at the primary level to class VIII in government-run schools.

Why such a move?

- Introducing separate English medium sections in government-run schools had become all the more important as such schools were lagging behind private English medium schools.

11. Madras HC issues notice to Union law secretary on PIL against mandatory death penalty

In News:

- The Madras High Court has issued notice to the Union law secretary and the secretary of the social justice and empowerment ministry on a PIL, urging for a section of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities Act), providing for a "mandatory death penalty", to be declared as null and void.
- The petitioner, alleged that section 3(2)(i) of the said act, providing for the punishment, was violative of the Constitution.
- Section provided for the punishment if any person, not being a member of the Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe community, gave or fabricated false evidence, with an intention to cause a member of the SC/ST community to be convicted for an offence, resulting in the imposition of capital punishment.
- The section added that if such a person was executed on account of the false evidence, the person responsible for the same should also be punished with death
- A mandatory death punishment had been held to be opposed to human dignity and struck down by constitutional courts across the world

12. Government drops plan to protect transgender labour rights

In News:

- The Union government has dropped plans to recognise transgender persons as the 'third gender' in the country's labour law framework.
- The Wages Code Bill was drafted under an exercise to rationalise the country's 44 labour laws into four codes covering all the regulations pertaining to wages, industrial relations, social security and safety, and health and working conditions.

Background:

- In 2014, the Supreme Court had for the first time recognised transgender persons as the 'third gender' and asked the Centre and the States to give them equal opportunities in education and employment.

Objections raised:

- **Labour Ministry's proposal:** proposed inserting clauses for recognising the rights of transgender workers in all the four labour codes.
- **Law Ministry's objection:** the Law Ministry objected, citing the General Clauses Act of 1897, according to which 'transgenders' fall within the definition of 'person'. It was then decided that there was no need to add a separate clause for them.

Transgender rights activist opinion:

- Dropping the separate clauses protecting transgender persons is a hypocritical move by the Union government, as it is well known that we face discrimination at the workplace.

- The dignity of our body needs to be protected at the workplace as well, with basic facilities such as restrooms and equal wages,”

Factories Act and Government proposal:

- The government’s proposed amendments to the Factories Act, 1948 in 2015 .
- It had also proposed special protections for transgender workers.
- **Proposal:** “Every transgender worker shall have equal right to work opportunities in a factory. The state government may make rules providing to secure the rights of transgender workers to ensure respect for inherent dignity, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of transgender persons as part of human diversity and humanity,”
- **Dropped:** in the case of the Factories Act, too, the clause pertaining to transgenders has been dropped in the latest draft amendments.

Key Statistics:

- Fifth Annual Employment-Unemployment Survey conducted by the Labour Bureau in 2015-16: 48% of transgender were either working or were available for work, as against 23.7% females, and 75% males.

13. SC poser to online giants on offensive content

In News:

- The Supreme Court has asked Google, Microsoft, Facebook and WhatsApp to provide the number of complaints received from India of any objectionable material posted online on their sites between the period of January 1, 2016 and August 31, 2017.
- **Why?** The court wanted to know whether the online giants had taken any action on the complaints received from India on materials like videos or pictures of child pornography, rape and gangrape, uploaded on their sites.
- Supreme Court further asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to respond to whether any prosecutions were initiated under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act of 2012. The court wanted to know the number of prosecutions initiated under Sections 19 and 21 of the Act between January 1, 2016 to August 31, 2017.

Basic Information:

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012:

- The Act seeks to protect children from offences such as sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. India is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1992. The parties to the Convention are required to take measures to prevent children from being coerced into any unlawful sexual activity.
- Any person below the age of 18 years is defined as a “child”. The Act seeks to penalise any person who commits offences such as “sexual harassment”, “sexual assault”, “penetrative sexual assault”, and “aggravated penetrative sexual assault”.

- A person commits “sexual harassment” if he uses words or shows body parts to a child with sexual intent, shows pornography to a child or threatens to depict a child involved in sexual act through the media. The penalty is imprisonment for upto three years and a fine.
- A person commits “penetrative sexual assault” if he penetrates his penis into the vagina, mouth, urethra or anus of a child or makes a child do the same or inserts any other object into the child’s body or applies his mouth to a child’s body parts. If however the child is between 16 and 18 years, it shall be considered whether consent for the act was taken against his will or was taken by drugs, impersonation, fraud, undue influence and when the child was sleeping or unconscious. The penalty is imprisonment between seven years and life and a fine.
- The Act penalises “aggravated penetrative sexual assault.” Such an offence is committed when a police officer, a member of the armed forces or a public servant commits penetrative sexual assault on a child. It also includes gang penetrative sexual assault and assault using deadly weapons, fire or corrosive substance. The Act also covers assault by staff of private hospital and staff of an educational institution if the child is in that institution.
- Penetrative sexual assault shall be considered aggravated if it injures the sexual organs of the child or takes place during communal violence or the child becomes pregnant or gets any other threatening disease or is below 12 years. It also covers cases where the offender is a relative of the child through blood or adoption or marriage or foster care or is living in the same household.
- A person commits “sexual assault” if he touches the vagina, penis, anus or breast of a child with sexual intent without penetration. If the child is between 16 and 18 years, it shall be considered whether the consent was taken against the child’s will or by threat or deceit. The penalty is imprisonment between three to five years and a fine.
- The offence of “aggravated sexual assault” is committed under similar conditions as for “aggravated penetrative sexual assault”. The penalty for the offence is

Imprisonment between five to seven years and a fine.

- A person shall be guilty of using a child for pornographic purposes if he uses a child in any form of media for the purpose of sexual gratification through representation of sexual organs of a child or using a child in sexual acts or other types of obscene representation. The penalty is rigorous imprisonment for upto five years and a fine. On
- subsequent convictions, the term of imprisonment is upto 7 years and fine.
- The Act also includes penalties for storage of pornographic material and abetment of an offence.

- An offence committed under this Act shall be reported to either the local police or the Special Juvenile Police Unit who has to report the matter to the Special Court within 24 hours. The police also have to make special arrangement for the care of the child. In case a person fails to report a case, he shall be penalised. Also, the Act includes penalties for making false complaints.
- Each district shall designate a Sessions Court to be a Special Court. It shall be established by the state government in consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court. The state government shall appoint a Special Public Prosecutor for every Special Court. The Court shall, as far as possible, complete the trial within one year.
- The trial shall be held in camera and in the presence of the child's parents or any person trusted by the child. The guardian of the child has the right to take assistance from a legal counsel of his choice, subject to the provisions of Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.
- If an offence has been committed by a child, it shall be dealt with under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000.

14. It's lonely on the ground

Context:

- In April, the government of India proposed amendments to the RTI Act
- The most controversial amendment pertained to Rule 12.

Amendment to Rule 12 and controversy:

- It would allow the withdrawal of an application in case of the applicant's death, making the job of those who file RTIs even more risky.
- The RTI activists are already exposed to violence, all the more so as the Whistle Blowers Protection Act (2011) is not implemented.
- 69 activists have been killed, according to the National Campaign for People's Right to Information

Violence against RTI Activists

- The states which have largest number of casualties are rich states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka
- Rich states are the most dangerous ones for RTI activists because they fight against the appropriation of public goods by predatory and vested interests, which are comparatively stronger in affluent provinces.
- Problems pertaining to land, illegal construction and property disputes are the root cause of most of the cases.
- Then come conflicts due to government schemes (including MGNREGA), either because those who should have benefitted from them have not, or because of embezzlement at the local level.
- The third category that is also well represented is made of illegal mining, including the sand mafia's activities.

- The RTI activists fight for their rights and/or those of others, but they are hardly protected by the police and judiciary.

RTI Activists – Importance

- RTI applications cover a wide range of issues and even if no action is taken, the media often publicize the cases and give bad publicity to the offending bureaucrats, industrialists or politicians.
- The RTI activists not only expose corrupt practices and crimes, but also provide alternative leadership at the local level.
- Some of them have become community mobilisers and have been elected sarpanch.
- The RTI Act has offered space to young Dalits, Adivasis and members of the minorities who would have been helpless otherwise.
- The role of "RTI clinics", often in the form of itinerant vans and helplines, has been key.

Challenges faced by RTI Activists:

- Information Commissions are burdened with huge pendencies
- The number of applications filed could easily decrease: If the frequently asked questions were identified and proactively disclose information for those questions
- But delays and backlogs are also due to the fact that the job of Information Commissioner has become a post-retirement sinecure for former bureaucrats who do not necessarily feel the urge of idealism.
- The attitude of the government of India is another big challenge. Some of its agencies refuse to disclose the required information.
- In PMO, the rejection rate is very high. The Commission does not have enough power for getting responses to its questions
- It does not have the mechanisms for following up on whether its orders have been complied with.
- The Information Officers do not necessarily get the right training
- Universities could include the RTI Act in their curriculum and offer not only degrees, but also continuing training for helping this major achievement to remain relevant.

15. Government backs varying ages for girls' marriage

In News:

- NGO's (Independent thought), petition before Supreme Court:
- Challenged Exception 2 to Section 375 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code, which permits "sexual intercourse with a girl child aged between 15 and 18 only on the ground that she is married".
- The statutory exception to rape was violative of right to life, personal liberty, equality and is discriminatory.

- The Exception is part of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 and is contrary to the anti-child sex abuse law, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act of 2012 (POCSO).

Supreme court's question to government:

What is the logic behind keeping different minimum ages for marriage under different laws?

- **Basis Information:** The age of consent varies from the Indian Penal Code to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act to the Hindu Marriage Act
- **Government response:** The legislature may have taken a conscious decision to retain the minimum age range for marriage between 15 and 18 for girls considering the socio-economic conditions of the country.

Basic Information:

Section 375 in The Indian Penal Code

- 375. Rape.—A man is said to commit “rape” who, except in the case hereinafter excepted, has sexual intercourse with a woman under circumstances falling under any of the six following descriptions:—
- (First) — Against her will.
- (Secondly) — Without her consent.
- (Thirdly) — With her consent, when her consent has been obtained by putting her or any person in whom she is interested in fear of death or of hurt.
- (Fourthly) — With her consent, when the man knows that he is not her husband, and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes herself to be lawfully married.
- (Fifthly) — With her consent, when, at the time of giving such consent, by reason of unsoundness of mind or intoxication or the administration by him personally or through another of any stupefying or unwholesome substance, she is unable to understand the nature and consequences of that to which she gives consent.
- (Sixthly) — With or without her consent, when she is under sixteen years of age. Explanation.—Penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary to the offence of rape.
- (Exception) — Sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape.]

16. SC likely to hear curative pleas against Sec 377 on September 8

Context:

- Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code: a colonial era provision criminalising consensual sexual acts of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) adults in private.
- The Supreme Court is likely to hear curative petitions against Section 377.

- The fight against Section 377 got a major boost when a nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, while upholding the right to privacy as a fundamental right intrinsic to life and liberty, ripped apart a 2014 judgment dismissing the case against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalises consensual sexual acts of adults in private.

What is section 377?

- Section 377. Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.
- Petitioner's contention: The petitioners have contended that homosexuality was not a mental disorder, but a normal and natural variant of human sexuality

List of Cases and their verdict:

- Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi- is a landmark Indian case decided by a two-judge bench of the Delhi High Court, which held that treating consensual homosexual sex between adults as a crime is a violation of fundamental rights protected by India's Constitution. The verdict resulted in the decriminalization of homosexual acts involving consenting adults, in the jurisdiction of the Delhi High court. This was later challenged in the Supreme Court of India.

Suresh Kumar Koushal (2013) Case Observations:

- Supreme Court has upheld the validity of Section 377 of Indian Penal Code.
- LGBT “minuscule minority”: no need to challenge Section 377 because the LGBT community constitutes only a minuscule minority.

National Legal Services Authority (2014) Case observations:

- Transgenders, even though insignificant in numbers, are entitled to human rights.
- Section 377 had been an instrument of harassment and abuse.
- Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity must end. Sexual orientation is not only a freedom flowing from the right to privacy, but also a demanding of non-discriminatory treatment
- Adoption of the Yogyakarta Principles — norms on gender identity and sexual orientation adopted by human rights experts in 2006 in Indonesia.

Latest: In the Aadhaar case the Supreme Court Observations are as follows:

- It has upheld the right to privacy as a fundamental right and an inherent component of human liberty and dignity.
- The nine-judge Bench has observed that the rationale behind the Koushal judgment is flawed and unsustainable.

- Rights of LGBT persons are real rights founded on sound constitutional doctrine and not "so-called rights" as the earlier Bench had described.
- Sexual orientation is an aspect of the right to privacy and an inalienable part of human dignity, freedom, and personal liberty.

Basic Information:

Curative petition:

- The concept of Curative petition was evolved by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra and Anr. (2002) where the question was whether an aggrieved person is entitled to any relief against the final judgement/order of the Supreme Court, after dismissal of a review petition.
- The Supreme Court in the said case held that in order to prevent abuse of its process and to cure gross miscarriage of justice, it may reconsider its judgements in exercise of its inherent powers.
- For this purpose the Court has devised what has been termed as a "curative" petition. In the Curative petition, the petitioner is required to aver specifically that the grounds mentioned therein had been taken in the review petition filed earlier and that it was dismissed by circulation. This has to be certified by a senior advocate. The Curative petition is then circulated to the three senior most judges and the judges who delivered the impugned judgement, if available. No time limit is given for filing Curative petition.

Requirements:

- To entertain the curative petitions, the court has laid down certain specific condition:
- The petitioner will have to establish that there was a genuine violation of principles of natural justice and fear of the bias of the judge and judgement that adversely affected him.
- The petition shall state specifically that the grounds mentioned had been taken in the review petition and that it was dismissed by circulation.
- The curative petition must accompany certification by a senior lawyer relating to the fulfillment of the above requirements.
- The petition is to be sent to the three senior most judges and judges of the bench who passed the judgement affecting the petition, if available.
- If the majority of the judges on the above bench agree that the matter needs hearing, then it would be sent to the same bench (as far as possible).
- The court could impose "exemplary costs" to the petitioner if his plea lacks merit.

17. Probe assets of politicians: SC

NGO, Lok Prahari petition:

- Filed a petition before Supreme Court.
- In the petition the NGO has urged for the inclusion of a column in the nomination form seeking details of the sources of income.

- The plea has claimed that the candidates do not reveal the sources of their income.

Supreme Court observations:

- The Supreme Court has criticised the government for not investigating the huge increase in assets, by up to 500%, of politicians from what they show at the time of nomination.
- The government had been saying it was in favour of electoral reforms, but it was not forthcoming when it came to revealing details about such massive rise in assets.

18. Attacks by cow vigilantes must stop, SC tells States

Context:

- Gau rakshaks: taking the law into their own hands.
- Attacks on innocents by cow vigilantes.
- Dalits and Muslims have reportedly been at the receiving end of violence unleashed by lynch mobs, especially in the four northern States- Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Supreme Court observations:

- Attacks on innocents by cow vigilantes must stop.
- Nodal police officers at district level: It ordered the States and the Union Territories to appoint nodal police officers in every district to crack down on such groups.

Centre's responsibility:

- The court urged the Centre to uphold its constitutional mandate under Article 256 and direct the States to act against the groups.
- It cautioned the Centre not to remain silent, leaving everything to the States.
- Centre's response: Violence by 'gau rakshaks' was a 'State subject' and it had no role to play, though it condemned all forms of violence.

Northern States accepted the directives given by Supreme Court:

- Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat accepted the apex court's suggestion to appoint dedicated officers in the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police to prevent 'gau rakshaks', as they call themselves, from taking the law into their own hands or becoming a law unto themselves.

Basic Information:

- Article 256. Obligation of States and the Union:
- The executive power of every State shall be so exercised as to ensure compliance with the laws made by Parliament and any existing laws which apply in that State, and the executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of such directions to a State as may appear to the Government of India to be necessary for that purpose.

19. Supreme Court Bench questions exception in penal law

Context:

- Sections 375 and marital rape.

Supreme Court questions Parliament:

- The Supreme Court questioned the reason for Parliament to create an exception in the penal law declaring that sexual intercourse by a man with his minor wife is not rape.
- The apex court asked the reason behind such an exception in the Indian Penal Code when the age of consent was 18 years for "all purposes."

Section 375 and the exception:

- Section 375 of the IPC, which defines the offence of rape, has an exception clause that says intercourse or sexual act by a man with his wife aged below 18 is not rape.

Conflict between POCSO and Section 375:

- The court said there was a conflict between this exception under the IPC Section 375 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012, which declares children below the age of 18 as minors.

20. How much do you share with third parties, SC asks WhatsApp, FB

Context:

- Contention raised by two law students via petition:
- Contract entered into between Facebook and WhatsApp in 2016 on data sharing was a violation of a citizen's right to privacy.
- The data, according to them, included photographs, messages, pictures and other personal documents shared by users on WhatsApp.

In News:

Five-judge Constitution Bench directives:

- A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court directed instant messaging platform WhatsApp and social media giant Facebook to file affidavits stating what user data they shared with "third parties."

Response by the advocate representing WhatsApp:

- Instant messaging platform does not share any personal data of its users with third parties.
- Only four details, 'telephone number, type of device, last access of the user and registration date' are shared.
- The court may not have the technical expertise to decide on this "complex issue".

European restrictions

- European privacy watchdogs have warned WhatsApp against sharing user information with parent company, Facebook.
- WhatsApp was acquired by Facebook in 2014.

- The petitioners argued that the same restriction should be imposed in India.

B.N. Srikrishna committee:

- The Centre has setup an expert committee under former Supreme Court judge, Justice (retired) B.N. Srikrishna, on July 31, 2017 to identify "key data protection issues" and suggest a draft Data Protection Bill.
- The Office Memorandum of the Justice Srikrishna Committee notes that the "government is cognisant of the growing importance of data protection in India. The need to ensure growth of the digital economy while keeping personal data of citizens secure and protected is of utmost importance".

21. Unruly fliers now face lifetime ban

In News:

- Union Government announcement: Air passengers can now be banned for a lifetime for unruly behaviour on flights by both domestic and foreign airlines.
- The unruly passenger will be put on a no-fly list, which will be made public and maintained by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).
- Other airlines will not be bound by the no-fly list of an airline

Categories and range of punishment:

- The ban will range between three months and a lifetime depending upon the gravity of the offence.
- For physical gestures, verbal harassment and being unruly while inebriated, there will be a ban on passengers for up to three months.
- For physically abusive behavior including pushing, kicking, hitting or sexual harassment, up to six months;
- For life-threatening behavior the ban may range from two years to a lifetime.
- Repeated offender:** the duration of the flying ban will be twice that of his previous ban

Complaint to be enquired by a committee:

- Airlines, on receiving complaint of unruly behaviour by the pilot-in-command, will refer the matter to an internal committee chaired by a retired district and sessions judge.
- The committee will include a representative each from different airline and passenger associations or consumer forums
- The internal committee will decide the quantum of ban based on evidence produced by both airline and passenger, including eye-witnesses, within a period of 30 days, failing which the passenger will be free to fly.
- The passenger will not be allowed to fly till the decision of the internal committee. However, there will be no compensation in case the allegations by the airlines are proven wrong.

- Aggrieved passengers can appeal within 60 days to an Appellate Committee, constituted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and chaired by a High Court judge.

22. West Bengal settles for Bangla as new name

In News:

- On August 29, 2016, West Bengal Assembly passed a resolution to change the name of West Bengal to Bengal in English, Bangla in Bengali and Bangal in Hindi.
- Now the State is compelled to have one name after the Centre rejected the earlier proposal of having three names in three different languages.

Basic information:

- Formation of new States and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing States: Parliament may by law.
 - a. Form a new State by separation of territory from any State or by uniting two or more States or parts of States or by uniting any territory to a part of any State;
 - b. Increase the area of any State;
 - c. Diminish the area of any State;
 - d. Alter the boundaries of any State;
 - e. Alter the name of any State;
- Provided that no Bill for the purpose shall be introduced in either House of Parliament except on the recommendation of the President and unless, where the proposal contained in the Bill affects the area, boundaries or name of any of the States, the Bill has been referred by the President to the Legislature of that State for expressing its views thereon within such period as may be specified in the reference or within such further period as the President may allow and the period so specified or allowed has expired
- **Explanation I:** In this article, in clauses (a) to (e), State includes a Union territory, but in the proviso, State does not include a Union territory.
- **Explanation II:** The power conferred on Parliament by clause (a) includes the power to form a new State or Union territory by uniting a part of any State or Union territory to any other State or Union territory.

23. Social revolution in a JAM

Context:

- PMJDY (Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana) and the JAM revolution can link all Indians into one common financial, economic, and digital space.
- The suggestion of equality as a criterion of governance that is conveyed by this is to be welcomed

JAM:

- JAM, deriving from Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile, combines bank accounts for the poor, direct transfer of benefits into these accounts and the facility of making financial payments through mobile phones.

- Aadhaar ensure that benefits reach the poor and enabling them to make payments through ordinary mobile phones.
- It eliminates the leakage in the transfer of welfare payments and enabling the poor to have bank accounts
- For furthering the latter the government has devised the Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) app.

Beyond bank accounts- What is required?

- Nationalised banking sector had done very little to extend banking services to the poor
- Having a bank account and access to reliable electronic payments system, is not the same as economic inclusion.
- Inclusion would entail equal access to opportunities for earning a livelihood. This in turn implies employment opportunities.
- Demand for labour exists only when there is demand for goods and services
- Even when the demand for labour exists, potential workers must be endowed with the capabilities to take advantage of the opportunity offered
- The potential of the JAM trinity for bringing about either of these conditions for economic inclusion is limited.

Lack of producer services

- Economic reforms of 1991 largely focused on liberalisation of the policy regime
- It meant to make it easier for firms to produce, exposing them to international competition with a view to increasing efficiency in the economy.
- Ecosystem of production requires access that firms have to producer services ranging from water supply to waste management.
- Producer services require large capital outlay, often deterring private firms.
- Even when producer units employ workers they are poorly capitalised, making it impossible for them to generate producer services themselves.
- Thus the public provision of producer services should be an essential part of public policy.

Focus on capabilities

- We have equipped all individuals with the essential capabilities.
- For this, society must have a minimum, universal health and education infrastructure accessible to all.
- Recent weeks witnessed governance failure on a major scale in many parts of the country.
- In U.P.'s Gorakhpur district children have died because the hospital is not able to maintain a steady supply of oxygen.
- Delhi's suburb of Ghazipur a garbage mountain came crashing down, again causing death and disruption.

- Building capabilities require committing resources to building the requisite social and physical infrastructure and investing time to govern its functioning

Private investment

- Private investment in India has declined steadily over the past few years.
- Overall growth had however been maintained, partly through the demand generating impact of public investment. But now even growth appears to be stalling
- Data actually point to a steadily slowing economy with growth having been successively lower in the past five quarters.
- There appears to be a mismatch between the government's own assessment of its policies and the private sector's valuation of their worth

24. SC to lay down law on LG's power

Context:

- Prolonged Centre-Arvind Kejriwal turf war over who controls Delhi as an "extraordinary matter".

In News:

Supreme Court observations:

- The Supreme Court has agreed to lay down the law on whether the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of Delhi can unilaterally administer the National Capital without being bound by the "aid and advice" of the elected government.
- The Supreme Court has refused to stay the HC judgment, despite submissions by Delhi government that the verdict "affects all future governments and all future relationships between the Centre and the State"
- **HC observations:** The HC had upheld the LG's power not only over the police, land and public order but also in "services". The judgment had effectively shrunk the Delhi Cabinet's girth.

Background:

- The 1996 judgment by the Supreme Court in North Delhi Municipal Corporation versus State of Punjab clearly terms Delhi as a Union Territory in a class by itself.
- The judgment observed that "the Union Territory of Delhi is in a class by itself but is certainly not a State". Union territories are in different stages of evolution.

25. West Pakistan refugees in J&K move SC challenging Article 35A

In News:

- Refugees of West Pakistan, who had migrated to India during the 1947 partition, have moved the Supreme Court challenging Article 35A of the Constitution.

Article 35A:

- Provision relates to special rights and privileges of permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir.

- Added to the Constitution by a Presidential Order in 1954
- It also empowers the state's legislature to frame any law without attracting a challenge on grounds of violating the Right to Equality of people from other states or any other right under the Indian Constitution.

Petition:

- There were around 3 lakh refugees from West Pakistan but those settled in Jammu and Kashmir have been denied the rights guaranteed under Article 35A which are given to the original residents of the state.
- The plea claimed that the refugees and their children are not allowed to hold any position higher than sweeper and the children are not entitled to gain education in government universities or avail any scholarship to gain education.

Basic Information:

- **Article 35A:** "Saving of laws with respect to permanent residents and their rights. — Notwithstanding anything contained in this Constitution, no existing law in force in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and no law hereafter enacted by the Legislature of the State:
 - a. Defining the classes of persons who are, or shall be, permanent residents of the State of Jammu and Kashmir; or
 - b. Conferring on such permanent residents any special rights and privileges or imposing upon other persons any restrictions as respects—
 - i. Employment under the State Government;
 - ii. Acquisition of immovable property in the State;
 - iii. Settlement in the State; or
 - iv. Right to scholarships and such other forms of aid as the State Government may provide,
- shall be void on the ground that it is inconsistent with or takes away or abridges any rights conferred on the other citizens of India by any provision of this part."

26. Uttarakhand to bring special heritage law

In News:

- Uttarakhand government is planning to bring a special legislation to cover unprotected heritage in the state.
- **Aim:** preserve buildings and sites of historic, aesthetic, cultural or environmental value which are not protected by the central law of the Archaeological Survey of India or any other existing government policies.
- The Uttarakhand Heritage Act seeks to conserve landmarks such as the Almorha Jail, where Pt Jawaharlal Nehru was imprisoned, the colonial-era Raj Bhawan in Nainital, historic precincts and trees, groves and natural fields of environmental significance.

- The statute would also cover natural features of environmental significance and sites of scenic beauty and provide for conservation and protection of areas which are environmentally sensitive.

Key fact:

- Around 71 monuments in Uttarakhand are protected by the State government under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act.
- Another 40 archaeological sites are covered by the Central government, through the ASI, under the same

27. Parties call for hybrid electoral system

Context:

- Electoral Reforms.
- The Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, headed by Congress leader Anand Sharma is deliberating on electoral reforms

In News:

- **Reforms suggested by:** The Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India.
- **What?** The above said parties have told a Parliamentary panel that the existing first-past-the-post-system needs to be replaced with a hybrid format where elections for a small number of seats are through proportional representation.
- **Hybrid format:** to include both first-past-the-post-system and proportional representation system.
- Argument in favour for proportional representation system:
- Majority aspirations and the actual will of the people is not getting reflected in election results.
- **Example :** Recent Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections held in March this year where the BJP which got 39 per cent of the vote share but won 312 seats, while the Samajwadi Party with 21.8 per cent votes got 47 seats and the Bahujan Samaj Party with 22.2 per cent got 19 seats.
- A party with even 20% share does not get a single seat, while a party with 28% can get disproportionately large number of seats.

Basic Information:

- **First-past-the-post system:** A first-past-the-post (abbreviated as FPTP, 1stP, 1PTP or FPP) voting method is one in which voters indicate on a ballot the candidate of their choice, and the candidate who receives most votes wins.
- **Proportional representation system:** Proportional representation is the idea that seats in parliament should be allocated so that they are in proportion to the votes cast.

28. SC to hear plea for ban on Blue Whale game

In News:

- The Supreme Court agreed to hear a petition for an immediate judicial direction to the government to ban an online game 'Blue Whale', which may be behind the deaths or attempted suicides of teenagers and young adults hooked to it.

Basic Information:

- The Blue Whale Game also known as "Blue Whale Challenge", is an Internet "game" that is claimed to exist in several countries. The game allegedly consists of a series of tasks assigned to players by administrators during a 50-day period, with the final challenge requiring the player to commit suicide.
- The term "Blue Whale" comes from the phenomenon of beached whales, which is linked to suicide.

29. Scrutiny of performance: Centre begins evaluation of judges for HC

Evaluation of Performance

- The Union Government has initiated a process to "evaluate" the performance of Judges recommended by the High Court collegium for appointment as judges of the court

Other officials:

- In the case of advocates, their reported judgements and in case of judicial officers, their case disposal time and number of adjournments are being evaluated
- These evaluations will be done by an in house team having legal background

Reason behind this step

- This is an internal effort by the government towards greater appraisal and scrutiny for better candidates
- This decision is in light of the SC's own observations in the NJAC(National Judicial Appointment commission)matter and Justice C S Karnan case
- The current mechanism for appointment of judges of the higher judiciary follows the collegium system
- There are many instances of alleged corruption and irregularities which have brought the system under the scanner

What now?

- The final decision on the appointments(of HC judges) is taken by the SC collegium(as done before)
- And the inputs provided by the government, including the result of the evaluation, will assist in the process

30. Six-month cooling period for granting divorce can be waived: SC

Context:

- The 1955 Hindu Marriage Act: It provides for a statutory cooling period of six months between the first and the last motion for seeking divorce by mutual consent.

In News:**Supreme Court observation:**

- Minimum cooling period of six months for granting the decree of divorce under the Hindu law can be waived by a trial court if there was no possibility of cohabitation between an estranged couple, who are seeking divorce with mutual consent, can file waiver application after a week of filing the first motion.

Period mentioned in Section 13B (2):

- Is not mandatory but directory.
- It will be open to the court to exercise its discretion in the facts and circumstances of each case where there is no possibility of parties resuming cohabitation and there are chances of alternative rehabilitation.

Trails conducted using video conferencing:

- the trial court "can also use the medium of video conferencing and permit genuine representation of the parties through close relations, such as parents or siblings, where the parties are unable to appear in person for any just and valid reason as may satisfy the court, to advance the interest of justice

Basic Information:

- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- Section 13B: Divorce by mutual consent. —
 - a. Subject to the provisions of this Act a petition for dissolution of marriage by a decree of divorce may be presented to the district court by both the parties to a marriage together, whether such marriage was solemnised before or after the commencement of the Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act, 1976 (68 of 1976)*, on the ground that they have been living separately for a period of one year or more, that they have not been able to live together and that they have mutually agreed that the marriage should be dissolved.
 - b. On the motion of both the parties made not earlier than six months after the date of the presentation of the petition referred to in sub-section (1) and not later than eighteen months after the said date, if the petition is not withdrawn in the meantime, the court shall, on being satisfied, after hearing the parties and after making such inquiry as it thinks fit, that a marriage has been solemnised and that the averments in the petition are true, pass a decree of divorce declaring the marriage to be dissolved with effect from the date of the decree.]
 - i. The period of 6 to 18 months provided in section 13B is a period of interregnum which is intended to give time and opportunity to the parties to reflect on their move. In this transitional period the parties or either of them may have second thoughts;
 - ii. The period of living separately for one year must be immediately preceding the presentation of petition. The expression

'living separately' connotes not living like husband and wife. It has no reference to the place of living. The parties may live under the same roof and yet they may not be living as husband and wife. The parties should have no desire to perform marital obligations;

- iii. The period of six to eighteen months time is given in divorce by mutual consent as to give time and opportunity to the parties to reflect on their move and seek advice from relations and friends. Mutual consent should continue till the divorce decree is passed. The court should be satisfied about the bona fides and consent of the parties. If there is no consent at the time of enquiry the court gets no jurisdiction to make a decree for divorce. If the court is held to have the power to make a decree solely based on the initial petition, it negates the whole idea of mutuality. There can be unilateral withdrawal of consent. Held, that since consent of the wife was obtained by fraud and wife was not willing to consent, there could be unilateral withdrawal, of consent;

31. Corrupt politicians always bounce back to power, observes SC**Context:**

- Electoral reforms.

In News:**Supreme Court observations:**

- Phenomenon seen in the past 25 to 30 years: MLAs and MPs, who face investigation for possessing wealth disproportionate to their known sources of income, always tend to bounce back to power.
- The court said the disproportionate assets cases against MPs and MLAs ought to be fast-tracked.

Court questioned:

- Whether this phenomenon, coupled with the mercurial rise in the assets of politicians just within a span of five years between two successive elections, was a product of ineffective investigation or of some "immunity" provided to them.
- Why the disproportionate wealth details of MLAs and MPs, who are representatives of the people, should not be disclosed to the public. There is no reason why the law should provide these public servants any immunity.
- Even information with respect to their (MPs and MLAs) income tax details should be open for disclosure... Why should information relating to the representatives of the people, who are public servants, get immunity?

- Directive given to the government: "If an MLA's or MP's assets have seen a 10X rise in 2019 from what he revealed in 2014, should you not conduct an enquiry into the very propriety of a person holding public office enjoying such phenomenal rise in his assets... The moment a candidate has shown 1000% increase in his income in the past five years, please have a mechanism to conduct an enquiry,"
- 1993 N.N. Vohra Committee Report highlighted the criminalisation of politics and the nexus among politicians, criminals and bureaucrats.

32. Chakmas to be made citizens

In News:

- Government of India is all set to give citizenship to over one lakh Chakma-Hajongs, Buddhists and Hindus who fled to India in the 1960s to escape religious persecution in the Chittagong Hill area of Bangladesh (undivided Pakistan then).
- Home Minister Rajnath Singh will chair a meeting where a final decision to grant citizenship to the Chakma-Hajongs will be taken.

No landownership rights:

- Chakmas would be granted citizenship but will not have any land ownership rights in Arunachal Pradesh, a predominantly tribal State.
- The Arunachalis have opposed giving any rights to Chakma-Hajongs.
- They would be free to buy land anywhere else in India but not in Arunachal Pradesh.

Basic Information:

- The Chakmas, also known as the Changma, Daingnet people, are an ethnic group scattered in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and West Bengal of India and in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.
- Today, the geographic distribution of Chakmas is spread across Bangladesh and parts of northeastern India, western Burma, and diaspora communities in Yunnan Province, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, South Korea, Japan and Australia.
- Within the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Chakmas are the largest ethnic group and make up half of the region's population. The Chakmas are divided into 46 clans or Gozas.
- They have their own language, customs and culture, and profess Theravada Buddhism. The community is headed by the Chakma Raja.

33. IIT Director unhappy with scrapping of new funding scheme

Vishwajeet Scheme:

- The scheme entailed the provision of Rs. 1,250 crore to each of the top seven IITs over a period of five years to upgrade infrastructure, hire foreign faculty, and collaborate with foreign institutions to break into the top league in global rankings

Higher Education Finance Agency (HEFA):

- Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) is a proposed not-for-profit agency with initial capital base of Rs. 1000 Crore.
- It was announced in Union Budget 2016-17.

Organization

- The HEFA will be set up with joint participation by the government and philanthropic donors.
- It would be set up under Companies Act and will be registered with RBI as Non-banking Finance Company (NBFC).
- It will be headed by a banker and will have a board with five donors and five institutions selected on rotation basis.
- All centrally funded higher educational institutions will automatically be added as members.

Objective and Proposed Functions

- The major objective of the HEFA is to leverage funds from the market and supplement them with donations and CSR funds.
- These funds will be used to finance improvement in infrastructure in top educational institutions. The monies of the fund will be used to finance capital expenditure for building quality infrastructure in IITs, NITs, IIITs and IISERs and central universities. It will also be used to fund state-of-the-art research labs and other infrastructure.

Funding and Finances

- Total corpus of the body is Rs. 2,000 crore. Out of this, the initial government contribution will be Rs. 1,000 crore. Remaining Rs. 1000 Crore would be collected from 5 other corporate donors {Rs. 200 Crore Each} of which the sponsoring bank would be one. Further, the body will be allowed to raise debt funding of up to Rs. 10,000 crore from the financial markets, including pension and insurance funds.

Uchchatar Avishkar Yojana:

- There are some specified guidelines issued by the Central Govt.'s Ministry of Human Resource and Development for the Uchchatar Avishkar Yojana (UAY) for the prime educational institutions (IIT's) of the country.
- These guidelines are to be followed to bring the new scheme of Govt. implemented in the premier institutions of India
- The main aim of launching the UAY scheme is to make students more accustomed with the outer world and give them a market oriented mindset.
- Implemented by Department of Higher Education.

Govt. funds for the UAY projects

- The Govt. is willing to spend around Rs. 25 crore per financial year in this Uchchatar Avishkar Yojana. However there is no limit as such on the size of the industrial project under this scheme. The entire funding will be generated from different areas. Half

of the project cost will be on the Ministry of Resource Development. Then 25 % will be borne by the participating department and the rest 25 % by the industry associated in the project.

34. OBC creamy layer income limit raised to 8 lakh per annum

In News:

- The 'creamy layer' ceiling for OBC reservation has been raised to Rs 8 lakh per year.
- These measures are part of the government's efforts to ensure greater social justice and inclusion for members of the Other Backward Classes.

35. Chakma-Hajong issue still open

Background Information:

- Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in erstwhile East Pakistan who left their homeland when it was submerged by the Kaptai dam project in the 1960s.
- The Chakmas, who are Buddhists, and Hajongs, who are Hindus, also allegedly faced religious persecution and entered India through the then Lushai Hills district of Assam (now Mizoram).

Government decision to grant citizenship:

- As per the Supreme Court's order, the government would grant citizenship to over one lakh Chakma-Hajongs, Buddhists and Hindu refugees who came to India from the Chittagong Hill Area in undivided Pakistan in the 1960s.
- **Middle path:** the refugees will not be given rights, including land ownership, enjoyed by the Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.
- They may be given Inner Line permits required for non-local people in Arunachal Pradesh to travel and work.

Basic Information:

Inner Line Permit

- Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document issued by the Government of India to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period.
- It is obligatory for Indian citizens from outside those states to obtain a permit for entering into the protected state.
- The document is an effort by the government to regulate movement to certain areas located near the international border of India.
- There are different kinds of ILP's, one for tourists and others for people who intend to stay for long-term periods, often for employment purposes.

The states which require the permit are:

- **Arunachal Pradesh** — issued by the secretary (political) of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. It is required for entering Arunachal Pradesh through any of the check gates across the interstate border with Assam or Nagaland.

- **Mizoram** — Issued by the Government of Mizoram. It is required for entering Mizoram through any of the check gates across the inter-State borders.
- **Nagaland** — Issued by the Government of Nagaland. It is mandatory for Indian citizens of other states entering Nagaland through any of the check gates across the interstate borders. Dimapur, Nagaland's largest city and porthead, is the only place in the state which does not require an ILP, and Indians arriving by air at Dimapur Airport can arrive and stay in the city without one.
- Indian citizens also need a Nagaland-issued ILP if entering Manipur by road via Dimapur or Kohima. However, demands by the Government of Manipur for the introduction of the provision of an Inner Line Permit system to restrict entry of outsiders into the state were refused.
- An ILP was previously required for certain parts of the Leh district in Jammu and Kashmir.
- There are also ongoing demands for the introduction of ILP in Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur to regulate entry of outsiders into the state.

36. Maharashtra's employment-linked scheme to increase mangrove cover

In News:

- Maharashtra state cabinet approved the Mangrove Protection and Employment Generation Scheme for 2017-18 and has made Rs 15 crore budgetary provision for it.
- This special scheme to preserve mangroves on public and private land and to provide employment opportunities — linked to mangrove cover — to people of the selected areas. The decision will help in protecting mangroves on around 30,000 hectares.
- Employment would be generated by setting up businesses such as crab farming, bee keeping, rice farming, fish farming and tourism. The businesses can be run through a committee or by an individual
- It will help in many people coming forward voluntarily for preserving mangroves.
- Committees would be set up in villages having mangrove cover to ensure group benefits by forming organisational structure.
- The committee will also prepare a micro plan for mangrove preservation, protection, setting up protection fences and improving quality of mangroves.

37. Court suggests audit of NULM funds

In News:

- The SC has suggested an audit by the CAG of the funds disbursed under the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) scheme
- The SC has questioned whether the money meant to build shelter homes for the urban homeless and poor across the country is was actually lying unspent or had been diverted for other purposes

Questions posed by Supreme Court:

- The SC has asked, "How can Government ensure that the money is spent?"
- Court has said that the funds for NULM should not be diverted as the money has been given for a specific purpose

Basic Information:**National Urban Livelihoods Mission.**

- National Urban Livelihoods Mission has been restructured and launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA) which replaces earlier poverty alleviation programme for the urban poor titled Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY).
- The main reason is that urban poor have a strong desire to come out of their poverty and improve their quality of life which they are unable to do.
- Social mobilization and strong institutional help are critical for them to come out, they lack access to livelihood opportunities and capital.
- It has also expanded the beneficiaries of urban poor to include the homeless and street vendors who are invariably ignored in government programmes.
- A special provision has been made for the funding of all-weather 24/7 shelters with all essential facilities for the urban homeless. In addition, up to five per cent of the NULM budget has been earmarked to provide support to urban street vendors which will include skill upgradation and development of vendor markets.

38. How to make Indian courts more efficient**Context:**

- Problem of 'Pendency' in Indian Judicial System
- Clearing out of Long Pending Cases
- Lower courts in Kerala, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Chandigarh have disposed of almost all cases that had been pending for a decade or more

Key Fact:

- A total of 11,000 cases pending for over 10 years in these four states and the Union territory of Chandigarh
- National pendency count is at around 2.3 million cases
- Delhi, Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka are also close to clearing out long-pending cases.

Lessons to be learnt from lower Courts:

- The high court of Punjab and Haryana has jurisdiction over the lower courts of Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh.
- Case management system—i.e. a mechanism to monitor every case from filing to disposal, setup a decade ago.
- It also began to categorize writ petitions based on their urgency.

- In addition, it set annual targets and action plans for judicial officers to dispose of old cases.
- And began a quarterly performance review to ensure that cases were not disposed of with undue haste.
- All these measures ushered in a degree of transparency and accountability in the system, the results of which are now apparent.

Judicial Case Management:

- In this system, the court sets a timetable for the case and the judge actively monitors progress.
- This marks a fundamental shift in the management of cases—the responsibility for which moves from the litigants and their lawyers to the court.

Law Commission of India's Report suggestions :

- The Law Commission of India in its 230th report has also offered a long list of measures to deal with the pendency of cases.
- These include
 - a. Providing strict guidelines for the grant of adjournments.
 - b. Curtailing vacation time in the higher judiciary.
 - c. Reducing the time for oral arguments unless the case involves a complicated question of law.
 - d. And framing clear and decisive judgements to avoid further litigation.

Way Forwards:

- The courts should also seriously consider incorporating technology into the system.
- Digitizing courts records has been a good start in this context.
- Just like automation powered by Artificial Intelligence is already helping doctors, it can also be leveraged to assist judges and lawyers.

39. Provide relief in cases of unnatural jail death, SC tells Centre, States**Context:**

- Unnatural Jail deaths.
- The judgment came on a letter addressed to the apex court in 2013 by its former Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti on the deplorable conditions of 1382 prisons across the country.

In News:**Supreme Court directive:**

- Directed the Chief Justices of all High Courts to suo motu register petitions to identify the kin of prisoners who died unnatural deaths from 2012 and order the States to award them compensation.
- This judgment is significant as the high court will now directly award compensation and ensure compliance by the States.

- For first time offenders: Appoint counselors and support persons for counselling prisoners.
- Extend family visits of prisoners and use phones and video-conferencing not only between a prisoner and family, but also his lawyers.
- **Supreme Court quotes:** Nelson Mandela Rules passed by the UN General Assembly says "merely because a person is in prison, it does not mean that he or she should be cut off from the outside world".
- State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs) to conduct a study and performance audit of prisons.
- Constitute a Board of Visitors which includes eminent members of society to initiate prison reforms.
- Encourage open prisons. Semi-open prison in Delhi are extremely successful.

Key Facts:

- CAG in 2014: Hospital in Tihar Jail has a shortage of doctors and other medical staff ranging from 18% to 62%.
- NHRC monograph: From 2007–2011, prisoners' suicides formed 71% of the total number of unnatural deaths.

Present Scenario:

- The National and States Human Rights Commissions decide and award compensations in cases of custodial torture, deaths, etc.
- However, compliance by State governments is low as these commissions do not exercise any power of contempt.
- Besides, the States go for a long-drawn appeal in the high courts and later on in the Supreme Court, if necessary.
- Why from 2012? National Crimes Records Bureau has records of unnatural deaths from that year.

40. Reservation charts on trains set to disappear

In News:

- The Ministry of Railways has decided to discontinue pasting of reservation charts on reserved coaches of all trains originating from some railway stations on an experimental basis for three months.
- The stations are New Delhi, Hazrat Nizamuddin, Mumbai Central, Mumbai Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Chennai Central, Howrah and Sealdah.

Why such a move?

- This follows a green initiative by South Western Railway's Bengaluru Division (SBC) that is saving about Rs 60 lakh on papers.
- The measure is expected to save substantial money to the national exchequer.

41. SC notice to Centre on plea to ban Blue Whale

In News:

- The Supreme Court asked the government to respond to a petition for an immediate direction to ban online game 'Blue Whale'.
- Blue Whale is suspected to be behind the deaths or attempted suicides of teenagers and young adults hooked to it.
- **Petition filed by:** advocate C.R. Jaya Sukin, representing another lawyer N.S. Ponnaiah, who wanted the government to take immediate steps to spread awareness about the dangers of playing the game and end its availability online.

42. As complaints mount, CAG starts audit of GST Network

In News:

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to audit GST Network's technical capabilities to assess if it is ready to handle the massive amounts of transactions.
- **Issues to be audited:** bandwidth capabilities of the network, robustness of the software, security aspects, and the architecture of the entire system.
- The CAG is empowered under the Constitution to audit various aspects of the GST, and it would have a clear picture by the end of the financial year after taxes are filed through the new system.
- **Complaints:** Several traders and tax consultants have been complaining about the cumbersome navigation and the extra work they have to do to meet with GST requirements.

43. Government asks companies to allocate 7% of CSR funds to Swachhta Hi Seva

In News:

- The government has asked companies to devote a portion of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds to Swachhta Hi Seva campaign.
- Government has sent a note to the heads of more than 1.1 million companies, urging them to devote around 7% of their CSR spending on the Swachh Bharat Kosh (SBK) to the Swachhta Hi Seva campaign.
- Swachhta Hi Seva Campaign.
- The Swachhta Hi Seva campaign will comprise a range of activities including.
- A nationwide drive to mobilize people to participate in shramdaan (voluntary work) on improving sanitation.
- Construction of toilets and making their surroundings free of open defecation.

CSR Rules

- The CSR rules came into effect on 1 April 2014.
- These rules state that companies with a net worth of Rs500 crore or revenue of Rs1,000 crore or net profit of Rs5 crore should spend 2% of their average profit in the last three years on social development-related activities.

- These activities include such as sanitation, education, healthcare and poverty alleviation, among others, which are listed in Schedule VII of the rules.

44. Narmada dam built despite attempts to stop it, says PM

In News:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Narmada Dam project.
- The foundation for the project was laid by the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Key Fact:

- Second biggest: The dam is the second biggest concrete gravity dam by volume in the world after the Grand Coulee Dam in the United States.
- **Hurdles faced:** World Bank refused to fund it on grounds of environmental damage and displacement of tribal people in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat.
- **Benefits:** farmers in the parched north Gujarat and Saurashtra regions would get irrigation benefits.

Basic Information:

- Grand Coulee Dam is a concrete gravity dam on the Columbia River in the U.S. state of Washington, built to produce hydroelectric power and provide irrigation water.

45. How to make Indian courts more efficient

Context:

- End-to-end digitisation of the Public Distribution System (PDS): To track the movement of foodgrains so that they reached the right beneficiaries.

In News:

- The project was launched in 2012 at a cost of Rs 884 crore to ensure that, at every step from field to fork, the government would be able to track the movement of foodgrains so that they reached the right beneficiaries. As part of the effort, all fair price or ration shops were to be digitised.
- The project also calls for automation of the supply chain — online monitoring of stock positions in godowns, tracking the movement of the food grains from the godowns to the fair price shops, SMS alerts to beneficiaries, etc.

No progress made in ensuring end to end digitization:

- 11 States have not taken the elementary step of digitising fair price shops and nine other States, including Uttar Pradesh, have hardly made any progress.
- But out of 5.26 lakh ration shops, only 51% have been digitised in three years.
- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland have cited connectivity issues for their inability to commence the process of digitisation.

- **Non – starters:** Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Punjab and West Bengal.

46. Rethinking police reform

Context:

- State police forces in India are among the least trusted public institutions.
- **“Can anything be done?”**

Background

- According to the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD), there are 15,268 police stations in India.
- These stations are organized under various administrative units like circles, subdivisions, districts, ranges and zones.
- The median ratio of police officers to constabulary is 5%.

Key stats:

- There are a total of about 1.8 million police personnel employed by Indian state police organizations today and there are also 300,000 vacancies.
- This results in a median 200 policemen for every 100,000 people, though it ranges widely from 76 in Bihar to 700 in Delhi.

Solutions:

- Dealing with 21st century challenges with the (currently applicable) Police Act of 1861 creates lots of issues
- The politicization of the police is a tough problem to solve in an environment in which money, votes, and instruments of intimidation (misuse of the police) mix
- According to a Takshashila Institution survey of public trust, state police organizations rank last among government organizations and agencies
- Numerous committees and commissions have opined on the issue of police reform
- Most of them have approached the problem from a quantity, capacity, capability, training, compensation and benefits point of view
- The solutions may generally be grouped into the idea of “if you make the policeman’s conditions better, then everything will improve”
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) and police reforms:
- The ARC recommended that the investigative functions of police be separated from the day-to-day law and order functions
- And the superintendence of the government over police be restricted in such a manner that the force retains operational autonomy
- It suggested a State Accountability Commission made up of five members of government, including the home minister and chief secretary and five non-partisan eminent citizens

- The ARC recommendation resolved the politicization dilemma by delegating operational control to the force and democratizing governance to a commission

Way forwards:

- Codifying checks and balances in respective police Acts will bring assurance against illegal orders by the political establishment to the police
- Currently, politicians use the power of the police for their purposes, but sidestep any responsibility for their failures
- Only by giving full accountability to the politicians can society hold the politicians responsible for their actions
- Only when full political accountability joins with the betterment in capacity, capability and equipment can we begin true police reform

47. Nutrient packets may replace food: Maneka Gandhi

In News:

- Women and Child Development ministry is planning to revamp of its supplementary nutrition programme.
- Direct to beneficiaries: States should provide nutrient packages directly to beneficiaries instead of providing food through anganwadis.
- Present scenario: the supplementary nutrition is in the form of take-home rations or hot-cooked meals.

New Policy:

- Under the new policy, instead of food, the focus would be on nutrient packets that will provide 1,000 calories to pregnant and lactating mothers and 600 calories to children.
- The packets(mentioned above) would have a dry mixture of peanuts, millets and micro-nutrients which can be consumed with milk, lassi, juice, or water.

Ministry's suggestion:

- Nutrient packages should be delivered through post offices.
- Thirty packages can be delivered through the post office to every family that has a baby and a pregnant mother. Since it is not vegetable or rice, it cannot be misused or sold in the market.

48. Rijju now says Chakmas can't be given citizenship

In News:

- **Supreme Court order, 2015:** directed the center to grant citizenship to the Chakma-Hajongs, Buddhists and Hindus from undivided Pakistan.
- **Union government:** decided to honor the Supreme Court's decision.
- Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijju response:
- The Supreme Court order was not implementable.

- The two persecuted communities who came from Chittagong (now Bangladesh, then undivided Pakistan) were settled in Arunachal Pradesh between 1964-69 and any citizenship to them will disturb the "demography" of the tribal State.

49. Reimagining the OBC quota

Context:

- Sub-categorization of the Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Creation of committee

- Recently, the government has announced the creation of a committee to look into sub-categorisation of OBC.
- This decision provides an opening to ensure social justice in an efficient manner.

Key Stats:

- The National Sample Survey (NSS) data from 2011-12 show that about 19% of the sample claims to be Dalit, 9% Adivasi, and 44% OBC.
- Among the population aged 25-49, less than 7% have a college degree.
- By most estimates, less than 3% of the whole population is employed in government and public-sector jobs.
- Since reservations cover only half the college seats and public-sector jobs, the mismatch is obvious.
- A vast proportion of the population eligible for reservations must still compete for a tiny number of reserved and non-reserved category jobs.
- It is not surprising that there is tremendous internal competition within groups.

Yardstick to determine marginalization within a particular caste:

- At the moment, the only reputable nationwide data on caste comes from the 1931 colonial Census and some of the ad hoc surveys conducted for specific castes.
- The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 was supposed to provide up-to-date comprehensive data.
- In the SECC in 2015, it was found that about 4.6 million distinct caste names, including names of gotra, surname and phonetic variations were returned, making the results almost impossible to interpret.
- For nearly 80 million individuals, caste data were believed to be erroneous.
- Since then we have heard little about the quality of caste data in SECC and even less about its results.
- Preparations for Census 2021 are ongoing.
- There is still time to create an expert group to evaluate the methodology for collecting caste data and include it in the Census forms.
- Losing this opportunity would leave us hanging for another 10 years without good data for undertaking sub-categorisation of OBC quota.

Addressing caste based inequalities:

- A two-pronged approach that focusses on eliminating discrimination and expanding the proportion of population among the disadvantaged groups could be a solution.
- **(1) Late Benefits**
- The present policies focus on preferential admission to colleges and coveted institutions like IITs and IIMs.
- But these benefits may come too late in the life of a Kurmi or Gujjar child.
- Their disadvantage begins in early childhood and grows progressively at higher levels of education.
- We know little about what goes on in schools to create these disadvantages but improving quality of education for all must be a first step in addressing caste-based inequalities.
- **(2) Benefits of reservations should be widely spread**
- Use of the OBC quota must be limited to once in a person's lifetime, allowing for a churn in the population benefitting from reservations.
- Linking the Aadhaar card to use of benefits makes it possible that individuals use their caste certificates only once.
- It will help in spreading the benefits of reservations over a wider population.

The way forward

- The present move by the government to rethink OBC quota could potentially be used to ensure that we have better data on caste-based disadvantages for future discourse.
- It also indicates a mood that wants to ensure that the benefits of reservation are widely spread.
- Increased attempts at linking benefits to Aadhaar allow us with an option to ensure that reservation benefits are not captured by a few.

50. Business Of Cleanliness**Context:**

- The Swachh Bharat Mission plans to achieve safe sanitation for all by 2019.
- There is also a well-defined process, for the different phases of the mission, across the sanitation value chain — build, use, maintain and treat (BUMT).
- So a national policy is in place; cities, state governments must operationalise it.

Waste Management problem

- Nationally, we generate 7 million tonnes of fecal waste every day but there no systems in place to safely dispose this waste.
- It bears disease-carrying bacteria and pathogens posing a serious threat to safe and healthy living.
- The truck operators can be monitored through GPS tracking process in order to ensure that they dump the waste at treatment plants/pre-determined sites.

Fecal sludge management system (FSM)

- It involves collecting, transporting and treating fecal sludge and septage from pit latrines, septic tanks or other onsite sanitation systems.
- This waste is then treated at septage treatment plants.
- The FSM ecosystem requires its stakeholders to collaborate closely.
- Citizens need to be aware about the importance of a regular schedule for desludging septic tanks.
- They must also be ready to pay part of the cost of running FS treatment plants through service charges.
- Sanitation workers are key to an effective FSM system. But with no proper disposal system or safety regulations in place, they face serious health hazards.

Advantages:

- The sludge is nutrient-rich. After treatment, it can be given to farmers for use as organic compost.
- It can even be treated and used for biogas, or to manufacture fuel pellets or ethanol.
- Once pathogens and bacteria are removed, the water can be used for irrigation, construction, by industry in cooling plants etc.
- With appropriate training, sanitation workers can be empowered to own and run FSM businesses — much like the producer -cooperatives of the agriculture sector.

51. Death penalty for hooch deaths in UP; government may issue ordinance**In News:**

- The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to add a section in the Excise Act providing for death penalty or life imprisonment to those responsible for hooch deaths.
- The state government will issue an ordinance in this regard soon.
- After Delhi and Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh would become the third state where bootleggers could be sent to the gallows if consumption of spurious liquor leads to loss of life or permanent disability.
- The amendment will also make the offence non-bailable.
- The new section seeks to provide that those convicted may be punished with life imprisonment, or Rs 10 lakh penalty, or both, or death penalty, in case of death or permanent disability caused to a person or persons due to consumption of illicit liquor.

52. Behaviour change needed to stop open defecation: Experts**In News:****Sanitation experts' opinion:**

- Emphasis on bringing about a sustained behavior change in the local communities to achieve the target of making the villages, towns and districts Open Defecation Free (ODF) in Rajasthan.

- The harmful impacts of open defecation on people's health and children's nutrition should be brought to their notice.
- **Open defecation and women dignity:** Stopping open defecation will restore women's dignity and protect them against harassment and sexual offences.

53. **CJI bars senior advocates from out-of-turn hearing of cases**

In News:

Present Procedure:

- Every morning, the Bench, led by the Chief Justice of India, gives leeway to lawyers who appear in cases that require an urgent hearing.
- Lawyers must convince the top judge, very briefly, that without an urgent hearing, the rights, even the fundamental rights, of their clients may suffer a grievous harm.
- The Chief Justices have allowed lawyers to "mention" cases for an early or out-of-turn hearing.
- The court uses its discretion to allow or dismiss the plea.
- Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra barred senior advocates from make any such urgent mention before his Bench.
- Chief Justice Misra, declared in a crowded courtroom that only advocates-on-record would henceforth make urgent mentions. This was aimed at providing a level playing field, and assuring the legal community that the case in question, and not the advocate, would guide the court's discretion to grant an early hearing.

Who is an advocate-on-record?

- Under the Supreme Court Rules, an advocate-on-record can plead for a party.
- The Rules mandate that only advocates-on-record file an appearance or act for a party.

54. **Pass Women's Reservation Bill in LS: Sonia**

In News:

- Congress President Sonia Gandhi has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to get the long-pending Women's Reservation Bill passed in the Lok Sabha.

Basic Information:

- Women's Reservation Bill [The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2008]
- Commonly known as the Women's Reservation Bill, it seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. Introduced by the UPA-I government in May 2008, it also provides that one third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved for women of those groups. Similar Bills have been introduced thrice before in the late 90's but lapsed with the dissolution of their respective Lok Sabhas.

Highlights of the Bill

- The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies. The allocation of reserved seats shall be determined by such authority as prescribed by Parliament.
- One third of the total number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved for women of those groups in the Lok Sabha and the legislative assemblies.
- Reserved seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the state or union territory.
- Reservation of seats for women shall cease to exist 15 years after the commencement of this Amendment Act.

Key Issues and Analysis

- There are divergent views on the reservation policy. Proponents stress the necessity of affirmative action to improve the condition of women. Some recent studies on panchayats have shown the positive effect of reservation on empowerment of women and on allocation of resources.
- Opponents argue that it would perpetuate the unequal status of women since they would not be perceived to be competing on merit. They also contend that this policy diverts attention from the larger issues of electoral reform such as criminalisation of politics and inner party democracy.
- Reservation of seats in Parliament restricts choice of voters to women candidates. Therefore, some experts have suggested alternate methods such as reservation in political parties and dual member constituencies.
- Rotation of reserved constituencies in every election may reduce the incentive for an MP to work for his constituency as he may be ineligible to seek re-election from that constituency.
- The report examining the 1996 women's reservation Bill recommended that reservation be provided for women of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) once the Constitution was amended to allow for reservation for OBCs. It also recommended that reservation be extended to the Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Councils. Neither of these recommendations has been incorporated in the Bill.

55. **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana flounders: 30 lakh trained in skills, less than 3 lakh get job offers**

Context:

- The government's flagship skilling scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), is struggling to achieve end-results
- Data reveals that out of a total 30.67 lakh candidates who had been trained, less than a tenth — 2.9 lakh candidates — had received placement offers.

Reasons:

- Lack of quality training: Information asymmetry regarding the demand-supply dynamics of skilled candidates

Plans ahead:

- Centre is now planning to shift focus to district-level schemes to yield better results in the short-term for its skilling initiative.
- Under the relaunched PMKVY, which started October 2, 2016 placement tracking has been made mandatory
- Now, the focus is going to be on greater participation of states
- And bringing district collectors into the picture to ensure delivery at the district level and monitoring of skilling schemes at the ministry level.

Basic Information:**Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana:**

- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The objective of this Skill Certification Scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

56. Government launches Saubhagya scheme for household electrification**In News:**

- Government has launched a Rs 16,320-crore scheme to supply electricity to all households by December 2018,
- This scheme will provide free connections to the poor and at very low cost to others.
- **Scheme:** The Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, named 'Saubhagya'.
- Rural Electrification Corp will be the nodal agency for the scheme.
- While public institutions and panchayats will be authorised to collect applications forms, distribute bills and collect payments.

Modalities of the scheme:

- It aims to improve the environment, public health, education and connectivity with the help of last-mile power connections across India.
- It will help reduce the use of kerosene lamps in non-electrified households.
- States that complete the scheme by December next year would be given an additional 15% grant by the Centre as incentive.
- The scheme is being funded to the extent of 60% by central grants, 30% by bank loans and 10% by states.

- Under the scheme, electricity connections will be given free to people identified by the Socio Economic and Caste Census of 2011.
- The scheme promises on-the-spot registration of applications.

57. UP primary teachers' appointment: Yogi govt makes written test compulsory**In News:**

- The Uttar Pradesh cabinet approved changes in the appointment process of primary school teachers making written examination compulsory for aspirants.
- A written examination of 60 marks has been made compulsory while 40 marks will be for educational qualifications.
- Only those candidates who have cleared TET (Teacher's Eligibility Test) exam will be eligible for the written exam.

58. Soon, you will be able to order diesel online**In News:**

- The Ministry of Petroleum is working towards creating an e-commerce platform in which customers can order diesel online and get delivery at their doorstep.
- Reason behind this move? doorstep delivery of fuel is a viable model to increase digital transactions as well as shorten queues at petrol pumps.

Key challenge ahead:

- **Petrol delivery:** since it is highly inflammable.
- Indian Oil Corporation has come up with diesel as the fuel for this model. It is not as flammable, and takes a lot of effort to catch fire.

59. Cabinet approves anti-superstition Bill**In News:**

- The Karnataka State Cabinet approved the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017 — better known as the anti-superstition Bill
- The bill seeks to ban among other practices the controversial 'made snana' ritual (devotees rolling over plantain leaves having food leftovers) in public/religious places.
- 'Made snana' is practised at Kukke Subrahmanya temple in Dakshina Kannada district, in violation of human dignity.
- Bill proposes to ban evil practices such as killing an animal by biting its neck (gaavu).

Bill seeks to ban:

- The Bill also encompasses ban on human sacrifice; coercing a person to perform fire-walk at religious festivals; piercing jaw with rods, baibeega practice; pelting stones in the name of banamathi, mata-mantra; creating panic in the minds of the people by invoking ghost or mantras; claiming to perform surgery with fingers, or claiming to change the sex of foetus in the womb.

- It also seeks to ban practices against women: forcing them to stay in isolation; subjecting them to inhuman and humiliating practices such as parading them naked in the name of worship (betthale save); and sexual exploitation by invoking supernatural powers.

Bill fails to cover:

- Regulations for astrology and vastu practice, piercing of ears and nose of children in accordance with certain rituals, and performance of religious rituals such as 'Keshlochan' by the Jains.

Vigilance officers:

- The Bill proposes appointment of a vigilance officer to monitor violations of the provisions of the law and its rules.
- Violators of the law will be penalised, with imprisonment of not less than one year and a fine of not less than Rs 5,000.

60. SC against last-minute litigation

In News:

- The Supreme Court has decided to lay down deterrent measures against "last-minute" litigation in medical admission matters.
- Supreme Court observations: approaching courts in the eleventh hour upsets the mental equilibrium of thousands of students and leaves admission procedures in colleges across the country in a tizzy.

61. 'Children born of void marriage are legitimate'

In News:

- The Supreme Court has upheld a Madras High Court decision that children born of an invalid or void marriage are legitimate and eligible for appointment in the government sector on compassionate grounds.

Case:

- The case dealt with the application filed by a man in the Southern Railway, following the death of his father while in harness.

Railway circular:

- The Railways rejected his application on the ground that he was born out of the second marriage of his father.
- Railway Board circular, 1992: bars the appointment of children born of void marriages, especially children out of a second marriage when the first marriage is still subsisting.

Supreme Court judgment in Rameshwari Devi versus State of Bihar, 2000:

- The apex court, in this judgment, had ruled on the legitimacy of children of void and voidable marriages.
- It held that even though the marriage was void, the children would be legitimate and would be entitled to claim share benefits, including family pension and death-cum-retirement gratuity.

62. Govt. studying report on online abuse

Context:

- Growing menace of online abuse.

In News:

- The Home Ministry has said it is examining an expert committee report that has recommended measures to contain the growing menace of online abuse, particularly against women.
- The report also deliberates on hate speeches and vitriolic messages on online platforms.

Background information:

- The expert committee panel was set up after the Supreme Court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act in 2014.
- The committee headed by T.K. Viswanathan, former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha, submitted its report to the Home Ministry recently.
- The panel has recommended amending Section 78 of the Information Technology Act, which mandates an officer not below the rank of an Inspector to investigate such cases of online misuse.

63. VVPAT to be used in Gujarat polls

In News:

- The Election Commission of India (EC) will use Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) gadgets with Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) in all 50,128 voting booths in Gujarat, which goes to the Assembly polls at the end of this year.
- **Key fact:** This is the first time an entire assembly poll will be conducted using the EVMs equipped with VVPAT
- VVPAT machines, which will be attached to the EVMs, will allow voters to verify if their vote has gone to the intended candidate. This would ensure transparency in the voting process, he said.

What is VVPAT?

- Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) or Verifiable Paper Record (VPR) is a method of providing feedback to voters using a ballotless voting system. A VVPAT is intended as an independent verification system for voting machines designed to allow voters to verify that their vote was cast correctly, to detect possible election fraud or malfunction, and to provide a means to audit the stored electronic results. It contains name of the candidate (for whom vote has been casted) and symbol of the party/ individual candidate.

64. Centre to review flexi-fares on select trains, says Goyal

In News:

- The Union government is planning to review the flexi-fare system introduced in premium trains last year.
- The Railways were also planning to reset its timetable by reducing the travel time for 600-700 trains through rescheduling and increasing speed.

- The Railways are also in discussions with the Indian Space Research Organisation to use GPS technology to monitor trains for punctuality.
- **Background information:** The Railways introduced the flexi-fare scheme in September last year in Rajdhani, Duronto and Shatabdi trains, under which 10% of the seats were sold at normal fare. The fare was increased thereafter by 10% for every 10% of the berths sold. The highest fare was 50% more than the normal price of the ticket.

65. UDAN flights: Govt allows airlines to use bigger planes, eases rules on connecting flights

Context:

- The civil aviation ministry has acceded to a request from some airlines that will allow them to potentially ply bigger aircraft for UDAN flights
- There will be more flexibility also in how they integrate such routes into their overall operations.

UDAN:

- UDAN(Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) is a regional aviation scheme that encourages airlines to fly to underserved airports at low fares.
- The airlines have to sell a certain number of seats (between nine and 40 currently) on such flights at a maximum of Rs 2,500 per hour of flying.
- In return, they receive a subsidy from the government.

New changes:

- Airlines can now make an UDAN destination part of a connecting flight, making it easier for them to integrate regional aviation routes into their overall operations
- But airline will have to declare 70% of seats on any such flight as UDAN seats irrespective of the kind of aircraft they are using.
- They will however only be paid subsidy for a maximum of 40 seats.
- The ministry has also done away with the stipulation that requires two airports to be 150km away from each other to qualify for UDAN flights.
- It has also allowed helicopters to participate in UDAN, and, in mountainous regions, four-seater aircraft.

66. Collegium moves to devise norms to pick, shift judges

Context:

- Appointment of judges and transfer of high court judges.
- Transparency in the selection process

In News:

- The five-member Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra has resolved to devise a procedure to streamline the process to select judges of constitutional courts.

December 16, 2015 judgment

- The SC had asked the government to frame a new memorandum of procedure for selection of judges
- **Disagreement:** The draft is stuck over a disagreement on the Centre's insistence on including a "national security" clause to enable the government to reject a name recommended for appointment as judge of the SC or HCs on these grounds.

Tussle between Judiciary and Government:

- The collegium has been firm that the Centre must put in writing its objections, including on national security grounds, for rejecting a recommendation and insists that if the collegium reiterates its recommendation the appointment must go through.
- But the Centre remains firm it will only show intelligence inputs on a person to the collegium and not put it in writing as this could jeopardise the future of a person whose appointment was stalled because of national security apprehensions
- The collegium headed by CJI Misra will soon give effect to the December 16, 2015 judgment of a five-judge bench mandating establishment of secretariats in the SC and each HC.
- The secretariat will collate data on the track record of persons being considered for appointment as judges and place it before the collegium.

67. After foodgrain and LPG, direct transfer of benefits for fertilizers kicks in from Sunday

In News:

- The government will launch the much-awaited direct benefit transfer (DBT) of fertiliser subsidy in Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Puducherry and Goa.
- Unlike other DBTs such as cash transfer for foodgrains or subsidised gas connection where the subsidy amount is directly transferred to beneficiary accounts, in this case the subsidy will go to the manufacturer or marketing firm.

No-denial Policy:

- The government will follow the no-denial policy, which means anyone can buy any quantity of fertiliser after giving details of his Aadhaar card at the retail outlet.
- Under this scheme, the retail fertiliser outlets equipped with PoS machines will be able to read buyers' Aadhaar cards. As the farmer buys, the difference between market rate and the subsidised amount will be credited to the bank account of the manufacturer or the marketing company concerned.

First phase of Implementation:

- After assessing the success of its implementation and capturing the details of consumption, government will consider to launch phase-II, which will be transferring the subsidy to the accounts of farmers.

Advantages:

- Records of sales and purchase will bring transparency about the quantity of fertilisers that companies are selling to farmers.
- Experts opinion: this move will reduce the total sale by 10-15% and thereby reduce the burden on the exchequer by about Rs 6,000 crore annually.

68. Reforms money can't buy**Context:**

- The Centre recently approved Rs 25000 Cr modernisation of police force scheme which will be implemented between 2017 and 2020.

Police force modernization:

- It will strengthen the law and order apparatus, modernise state police forces and enhance their capacity to combat terrorism.
- It also has special provisions for women's security, mobility of police forces, logistical support, hiring of helicopters, upgradation of police wireless, satellite communications, crime and criminal tracking network and systems (CCTNS) and e-prisons.
- The idea is to assist the states to upgrade their police infrastructure, especially in respect of transport, communications and forensic support, to enable them to effectively tackle the emerging challenges.

Funding Pattern:

- Centre share 75 per cent while the states' share will be the rest.
- Under the scheme, J&K, north-eastern states and states affected by Left-Wing Extremism will get a boost of Rs 10,132 crore.
- 14th Finance Commission's recommendations increased the state's share of central taxes from 32 per cent to 42 per cent, following which Centre de-linked eight centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) from its support in 2015.
- While central funding of modernisation of police was stopped, non-plan funding for the same would continued.
- Thereafter, majority of state governments were disinclined to make any investments in police.
- But, the Centre again started its funding in internal security with modernization of police forces scheme on the recommendation of Cabinet Committee on Security.

Smart Police

- The PM in 2014 enunciated the concept of SMART police. The smartness has two dimensions external and internal.

- External Dimension** refers to the uniform a policeman wears, the way he carries himself, his weapons, the communication equipment on his person, his mobility, response time, et al. The scheme would enhance his capabilities to respond to and deal with the kind of challenges he is confronted with in his day to day work.
- Internal Dimension** refers to the expanded acronym of SMART that is, the police should be strict and sensitive, modern and mobile, alert and accountable, reliable and responsible, tech-savvy and trained. This is far more important than the external dimension but the scheme hardly improves this aspect.

Problems:

- Today we have Ruler's police but what we need is People's police.
- Accountability has to be to the Constitution, the laws of the land and the people of the country.
- The police is being accused of being insensitive to poor and tribals.

Way Forward

- Reliability would increase only when the police are objective, fair and impartial. Gadgets won't help here.
- It is the state of mind which matters. And to achieve that state of mind, police must be freed from the stranglehold of politicians.
- The scheme must be followed by structural reforms, institutions like the state security commission, police establishment board and complaints authority must be set up in every state in keeping with the directions of the Court.
- The GOI should bring police and public order in the Concurrent List of Schedule VII of the Constitution. Constitutional experts like Fali S. Nariman have strongly spoken in favour of such an amendment.
- Sustained economic progress needs the solid foundation of good law and order, and we cannot have good law and order in the country unless the police are reorganised, restructured and rejuvenated.

Basic Information:**Cabinet Committee on Security.**

- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) of the Central Government of India decides on India's defence expenditure, matters of National Security, and makes significant appointments.
- CCS is chaired by the Prime Minister of India and comprises the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Minister of External Affairs.

Central Sector Scheme

- It is entirely (100%) funded by the Union Government and implemented by central agencies.
- These schemes are mainly related to the subjects in the Union list.

Centrally Sponsored Schemes

- A certain percentage of the funding is borne by the States in the ratio of 50:50, 70:30, 75:25 or 90:10 and the implementation is by the State Governments.
- These schemes are mainly related to the subjects in the State List.

69. Major Swachh hiccups: Funds crunch, failure to transport and segregate waste**Context:**

- The inadequacy of the municipal mechanism to collect and transport garbage from urban homes to dumping yards is a significant lacuna and highlights the need for smarter integration of Swachh Bharat with urban renewal programmes like AMRUT.
- There is no uniform mechanism for maintenance and sweeping and lifting of garbage across urban areas.

In News:**Key stats:**

- About 75% of 1.7 lakh tonnes of municipal waste (garbage) that Indian cities and towns generate daily goes to landfill sites or dumping yards untreated
- Civic bodies cover only 44,650 out of 81,000 municipal wards through their door-to-door collection scheme.
- These statistics tell the government where to concentrate funds and policy planning if Swachh Bharat is to deliver the results PM Narendra Modi has sought.

Reasons:

- Urban issues are state subject and success or failure is determined by public participation and political drive.
- Cities in southern states have done well simply because there is concerted effort in which local leaders give cleanliness priority
- Municipalities cannot spend more on collection, transportation and processing of garbage as many are hard put to pay salaries
- The challenge was of building managerial capacity as well as tapping funds.
- Financial health of municipalities is poor and it's almost impossible for small ones to fund treating waste. "Centre gives only 35% of expenses for the entire solid waste management chain. Getting the rest from state and municipality is difficult in most states except a few like Maharashtra. Small urban areas growing fast are hit hardest,"

ECONOMY

1. GDP growth slips to 5.7% in April-June

In News:

- April- June, 2017: India's GDP growth rate is 5.7%
- The slowest pace recorded in 13 quarters.
- Gross fixed capital formation: reflects the investments into the country, stood at a four-quarter high of 29.8% of GDP, but was still lower than the 31% clocked in the same quarter of 2016-17.

2. Fiscal deficit touches 92.4% of budget estimates at July-end

In News:

- India's fiscal deficit at July- end touched 92.4 % of the budget.
- **Reason:** because of front loading of expenditure by various government departments.

Target:

- 2017-18: fiscal deficit to 3.2 % of the GDP.
- 2016-17: Government had met the deficit target of 3.5 % of the GDP.

Basic Information:

Fiscal Deficit:

- The difference between total revenue and total expenditure of the government is termed as fiscal deficit. It is an indication of the total borrowings needed by the government.
- A deficit is usually financed through borrowing from either the central bank of the country or raising money from capital markets by issuing different instruments like treasury bills and bonds.

3. Core sector output growth quickens to 2.4% in July

In News:

- Core sector output grew 2.4% year-on-year basis in July, 2017-18.
- **Reasons:** favorable base effect for steel, cement, fertilizers and electricity.

Basic Information:

Base Effect:

- The base effect refers to the impact of the rise in price level (i.e. last year's inflation) in the previous year over the corresponding rise in price levels in the current year (i.e., current inflation): if the price index had risen at a high rate in the corresponding period of the previous year leading to a high inflation rate, some of the potential rise is already factored in, therefore a similar absolute increase in the Price index in the current year will lead to a relatively lower inflation rates. On the other hand, if the inflation rate was too low in the corresponding period of the previous year,

even a relatively smaller rise in the Price Index will arithmetically give a high rate of current inflation.

IIP:

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index for India which details out the growth of various sectors in an economy such as mineral mining, electricity and manufacturing.
- The all India IIP is a composite indicator that measures the short-term changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products during a given period with respect to that in a chosen base period.
- It is compiled and published monthly by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) six weeks after the reference month ends.
- The level of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an abstract number, the magnitude of which represents the status of production in the industrial sector for a given period of time as compared to a reference period of time.
- The base year was at one time fixed at 1993-94 so that year was assigned an index level of 100. The current base year is 2011-2012.[1].
- The Eight Core Industries comprise nearly 40.27% of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). These are Electricity , steel, refinery products, crude oil, coal, cement, natural gas and fertilisers.

4. 'Trade-distorting farm subsidies must go

Context:

- Joint proposal submitted by India and China to the World Trade Organization.
- Upcoming 11th Ministerial Conference (MC) of the WTO to be held in Buenos Aires in December 2017

In News:

What is the proposal?

- Proposal called for the delevelimination — by developed countries — of the most trade-distorting form of farm subsidies, as a prerequisite for consideration of other reforms in domestic support negotiations.
- **Contention:** Developed countries, including the US, the EU and Canada, have been consistently providing trade-distorting subsidies to their farmers at levels much higher than the ceiling applicable to developing countries.

Aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS) and developing countries:

- Aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS) or 'Amber Box' support: The most trade-distorting form of farm subsidies

- Developed countries have more than 90% of global AMS entitlements amounting to nearly \$160 billion.
- Most of the developing countries, including India and China, do not have AMS entitlements.
- **China and India says:** Elimination of AMS should be the starting point of reforms rather than seeking reduction of subsidies by developing countries.

5. Odisha rated as low-growth State

- The NITI Aayog's 'Ease of Doing Business Report: An Enterprise Survey of Indian States'
- It points at issues in setting up new businesses in Odisha compared to other States
- The 15-high growth States include Bihar, Uttarakhand, Tripura, Sikkim and Meghalaya
- **Basis of the report:** The NITI Aayog and IDFC Institute, its knowledge partner, have classified States on the basis of their average annual real growth rate
- By using State GDP from 2004-05 to 2013-14

6. Domestic sugar production may increase 18-20% in October-September. ICRA

In News:

ICRA predication of domestic sugar availability:

- Domestic sugar production is likely to increase by 18-20% to around 24-24.5 million MT in sugar year (SY) 2018.

How?

- Recovery in cane availability in Maharashtra and north Karnataka supported by monsoons.
- Expected increase in sugar production in Uttar Pradesh.

For the sugar year 2017:

- ICRA estimate: stock to end between 4-4.5 million MT.
- Stock is expected to be sufficient for around two months of domestic consumption despite the possibility of a localised sugar deficit condition in the southern and western states during the forthcoming festival season.

Analysis:

- Low closing stock levels of sugar in the domestic market are likely to support the sugar prices in the near term.
- UP-based mills are likely to benefit from healthy sugar prices along with continued healthy volumes and recovery rates, although that impact could be partly offset by higher cane prices.
- Mills in Maharashtra and north Karnataka are expected to be negatively impacted by higher costs and reap benefits of higher production.

Basic Information:

ICRA Limited (ICRA)

- ICRA Limited (ICRA) is an Indian independent and professional investment information and credit rating

agency.

- It was established in 1991, and was originally named Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency of India Limited (IICRA India).
- It was a joint-venture between Moody's and various Indian commercial banks and financial services companies. The company changed its name to ICRA Limited, and went public on 13 April 2007, with a listing on the Bombay Stock Exchange and the National Stock Exchange.

7. Centre tells PSBs to begin merger process 'immediately'

In News:

- **Merge immediately:** The Centre wrote a letter to public sector banks asking them to start the merger process immediately and their respective boards to take up the issue.
- The government wants the proposal for the merger to come from the bank itself.
- Approval requirement of Competition Commission to expedite mergers among PSBs had been done away with.
- Move based on the Narasimham committee report, which had highlighted the need for large-sized bank that could fund the huge infrastructure need of the country.

Procedure:

- Once the board approves the merger plan, it has to be sent to the 'alternative mechanism' approved by the Union Cabinet.
- Banks have also been asked to seek the banking regulator's view regarding their proposal.

Key Fact:

- Public sector that controls 70% of the market, are reeling under the pressure of asset quality which has depleted capital
- Gross non-performing asset ratio in the banking system was 9.6% and stressed asset ratio at 12%.

8. Switzerland for early India-EFTA pact

In News:

- Visiting President of Switzerland Doris Leuthard said: early conclusion of the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as well as an investment protection framework would boost economic ties between the two sides.
- Negotiations have been running since 2008.
- European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members: Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein.

Basic Information:**Internet Grievance Forum:**

- The IGF is a forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue on public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance issues, such as the Internet's sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development.
- The United Nations Secretary-General formally announced the establishment of the IGF in July 2006 and the first meeting was convened in October/November 2006.

Purpose:

- The purpose of the IGF is to maximize the opportunity for open and inclusive dialogue and the exchange of ideas on Internet governance (IG) related issues; create opportunities to share best practices and experiences; identify emerging issues and bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public; contribute to capacity building for Internet governance.
- The main aim of the IGF is to facilitate inclusive, productive discussions on Internet related public policy issues from a general perspective, while keeping all stakeholders involved. This includes having a harmonized and consistent approach when covering IG issues. To further this aim, the IGF adheres to the generally used UN principle of discouraging ad hominem attacks. As such, participants should refrain from singling out individual persons, companies, countries or entities during their interventions and throughout the general discussions and debates in main sessions, workshops and other events at IGF meetings. Concrete examples can be highlighted in the overall coverage of IG issues as long as it is not done in a blatantly inflammatory or potentially libelous way. Singling out one entity without broader context could not only discourage further participation of this entity, but endanger inclusive and productive discussion at the IGF.
- **Free Trade Agreement:** A free-trade area is the region encompassing a trade bloc whose member countries have signed a free-trade agreement (FTA). Such agreements involve cooperation between at least two countries to reduce trade barriers – import quotas and tariffs – and to increase trade of goods and services with each other.
- The degree of economic integration can be categorized into seven stages:
 - * Preferential trading area
 - * Free trade area
 - * Customs union
 - * Common market
 - * Economic union
 - * Economic and monetary union
 - * Complete economic integration

9. Shifting goal posts: Demonetisation has totally failed to curb black money**Context:**

- demonetisation was failure because RBI's annual report showed that 98.96% of the demonetised currency had returned to the central bank.

Aims& Objectives:

- November 8, 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced to the nation that ₹500 and ₹1,000 currency notes would cease to be legal tender.
- It was aimed at breaking the grip of corruption and black money
- The notes hoarded by anti-national and anti-social elements will become just worthless pieces of paper.
- Sizeable part of the ₹15.44 lakh crore of the two high-value banknotes would remain in the hands of the holders.
- This demonetised money would not be tendered back into the banking system due to fear of punitive government action

Result:

- RBI's annual report, showed that as much as 98.96% of the demonetised currency had returned to the central bank as of June 30
- RBI circular setting a ₹5,000 limit on deposits of withdrawn notes unless done under the government's amnesty scheme, was a measure intended to dissuade bank customers from returning the demonetised currency.
- Finance Minister to now claim that the "confiscation of money" had not been an objective, and the government had expected all the SBNs [specified bank notes] to come back to the banking system to become effectively usable currency
- Despite the large amounts that were deposited in banks post-demonetisation, it is doubtful whether the Income Tax authorities have the necessary resources to track down and penalise the corrupt.

Demonetisation –Some benefits

- Fostering greater compliance with the tax laws.
- Reducing the economy's reliance on cash through increased adoption of digital payments.
- But such gains could have been achieved by other and less self-defeating ways.

10. U.S. court rules in favour of Dr. Reddy's in patent litigation**In News:**

- **Indivior assertion:** the proposed generic version of Suboxon. Inte (buprenorphine and naloxone) sublingual film by Dr. Reddy's Laboratories infringes the patent.

U.S. District Court ruling:

- Ruled in favor of Reddy's laboratory- does not infringe any patents.
- Dr. Reddy's Laboratories statement: The judgment reiterates our commitment to providing affordable and innovative medicines that address the unmet and under-met needs of patients around the world

11. PM tells tax authorities to bring all traders in GST net**In News:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directive to tax officials: make every effort to bring all traders, including smaller businesses with turnover of less than Rs 20 lakh, into the Goods and Services Tax (GST) net.
- Currently, traders with less than Rs 20 lakh annual turnover have to register under GST only if they are supplying goods to other States.
- PM said he was dismayed at the huge pendency of tax-related cases where huge sums of money that could have been used for the welfare of the poor were locked up.
- He also asked the officers to use data analytical tools to pro-actively track and determine undeclared income and wealth
- Mooting a time-bound solution for 'tax raised and not realised', the PM said that human interface must be kept to a minimum in the tax administration's dealings by pushing "e-assessment" and anonymity of proceedings using technology.

12. Banks' cuppa to brew with mergers**Issues with Bank Merger**

- Various governments has highlighted the need for large-sized banks to fund the huge infrastructure requirements of the country as well as compete with global lenders
- **But a serious question arises:** 'Which chief executive will propose to merge his bank with another and lose his job?'

Move by the current government

- Present government has no intention to make it 'voluntary' for the board of a bank to decide on a merger
- It is evident from the fact that government has wrote letters to banks to kick start the process of mergers and get their respective boards' approval
- This may be the first time in recent history that an official communication has been made by the government to the banks asking them to act on mergers

Alternative Mechanism

- The government has also set up an 'Alternative Mechanism'
- It would comprise a ministerial group, to oversee proposals for mergers among banks

- A framework had been conceived in which a bank's board would first clear the decision to merge
- And then send the proposal to the 'Alternative Mechanism' for its in-principle approval
- After the in-principle approval comes through, the bank will take steps in accordance with law and SEBI's requirements
- The final scheme will be notified by the government in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

No need of CCI permission, now

- Some hurdles have been removed to expedite the process
- For example, approval requirement from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) has been done away with

Post Merger Issues

- The merger would create a lot of complexities in terms of branch rationalisation and reduction in human resources productivity for the merged entity
- At present, we've an example of the merger of SBI with associate banks
- Bhartiya Mahila Bank; post merger, the merged entity fundamentals have weakened significantly
- Also, after its merger, SBI has seen NPAs rising significantly, from Rs. 1.01 lakh crore (6.94%) to Rs. 1.88 lakh crore (9.97%)

13. Investing in the ecosystem**Context:**

- The natural capital and how it can maximize the benefits of economic growth and development

Natural Capital:

- Natural capital can be defined as the world's stocks of natural assets which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things
- It is from this natural capital that humans derive a wide range of services, often called ecosystem services, which make human life possible

Value of the Indian Natural Capital:

- With 11% of the world's floral and faunal species, India is one of the 17 most ecologically diverse countries
- India is blessed with every major ecosystem, these biomes directly contribute billions of dollars to the Indian economy, annually
- The financial value of India's forests, for example, which encompass economic services such as timber and fuel wood, and ecological services such as carbon sequestration, is estimated to be \$1.7 trillion

Boundaries:

- Scientists have identified nine earth system processes to have boundaries
- These boundaries mark the safe zones, beyond which there is a risk of 'irreversible and abrupt environmental change'

- Four of these boundaries have now been crossed
 - a. Climate change
 - b. Loss of biosphere integrity
 - c. Land system change
 - d. Biogeochemical cycles, such as phosphorus and nitrogen cycles
- This means that human activity has already altered the balance of a few delicate equilibriums
- The effects of these alterations are reflected by changing weather patterns, accelerated extinction events for both flora and fauna, and global warming
- This stresses the need for a comprehensive evaluation system that takes these undesirable side-effects of economic activities into account

Way forward:

- Unlike the economic value of goods and services, the intangible nature of natural assets is mostly invisible and hence remains unaccounted for
- While it may be difficult to put a price tag on nature, unchecked exploitation of scarce natural resources and an inadequate response to India's unique climate challenges can be a very costly mistake
- Integrating natural capital assessment and valuation into our economic system is critical to usher in a truly sustainable future for India

14. Don't know how much black money was wiped out by demonetisation: RBI

In News:

- The RBI has told a parliamentary panel that it has "no information" on how much black money has been extinguished as a result of demonetisation of Rs. 500/1,000 notes or about unaccounted cash legitimised through exchange of currency post note ban.
- **Key estimate:** about Rs 15,280 crore in junked notes has come back.

15. Policy soon to develop agri-clusters and boost farm exports: Prabhu

In News:

- New policy on the anvil: The government will soon bring out a policy to develop agricultural clusters and boost farm exports.

Basic Information:

ICFA (Indian Council of Food and Agriculture):

- ICFA is a national level platform in India with a mandate for policy research, advocacy and enterprise development in food and agriculture sector.
- Besides, ICFA is engaged in business and trade facilitation, farm services and providing a platform for global partnerships.
- ICFA emerged out of the long felt need for a comprehensive approach to address issues in food and agriculture sector and tapping of emerging

global business opportunities overcoming compartmentalized approach and absence of coordination and dialogue among various stakeholders.

- Currently in India, various stakeholders in the food and agriculture sector like the national and state governments, policy makers, research and academic bodies, extension agencies, value addition industry, NGOs, financial bodies, developmental institutions and farmers groups think in silos, often with contradictory approaches for the same ultimate cause.
- ICFA aims to foster convergence and greater communication between different stakeholders and work towards bringing India aggressively into the loop of global trade and commerce.
- Headquartered in New Delhi, India, ICFA has drawn in the vast experience and expertise of a number of professionals cutting across various subsectors in the food and agriculture sector and has constituted a number of working groups and national councils to represent the interests of various stakeholders. It has also incorporated several state specific working groups.

16. RBI includes HDFC Bank in the 'too big to fail' list

In News:

- RBI has added HDFC Bank, the second largest private sector lender of the country – in the list of Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs).
- State Bank of India and ICICI Bank continue to be in that category.

Basic Information:

Domestic Systemically Important Banks (D-SIBs)

- Following the global financial crisis of 2008, it was observed that problems faced by certain large and highly interconnected financial institutions hampered the orderly functioning of the financial system, which in turn, negatively impacted the real economy.
- It was decided to identify such institutions and prescribe them higher capital requirements.
- The RBI has adopted a system by which banks are plotted into four buckets based on a lender's systemic importance scores in ascending order.
- The banking regulator prescribes higher capital requirements — in terms of additional Common Equity Tier 1 (CET 1) capital — for such entities.
- RBI had started listing D-SIBs from August 2015. SBI and ICICI Bank were identified as D-SIB both in 2015 and 2016.

17. India to flag worry on pace of services talks at RCEP

- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):
- Proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) involving 16 Asia-Pacific nations.

- 10-member ASEAN bloc (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and its six FTA partners including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.
- **RCEP 'Guiding Principles and Objectives':** negotiations on trade in goods, trade in services, investment and other areas will be conducted in parallel to ensure a comprehensive and balanced outcome.
- India to raise the following issues at the forth-coming ministerial-level meeting:
 - Slow pace of negotiations on services trade liberalization as opposed to 'higher priority' being accorded to commitments to open up goods trade in the region.
 - **No much progress:** issues such as Intellectual Property Rights and investment liberalization.
 - **'RCEP Travel Card':** Idea mooted by India
- India is seeking support for its proposal on an 'RCEP Travel Card'
- India is relatively strong in services with its vast pool of professionals including from sectors such as Information Technology, as well as in activities such as installation, trouble shooting, training, maintenance, investment management.
- Issues raised by other members: easing norms on temporary movement of people could lead to immigration of professionals from India and in turn loss of jobs for locals.

Basic Information:

- **Free Trade Agreement:** A free-trade area is the region encompassing a trade bloc whose member countries have signed a free-trade agreement (FTA). Such agreements involve cooperation between at least two countries to reduce trade barriers – import quotas and tariffs – and to increase trade of goods and services with each other.
- The degree of economic integration can be categorized into seven stages:
 - * Preferential trading area
 - * Free trade area
 - * Customs union
 - * Common market
 - * Economic union
 - * Economic and monetary union
 - * Complete economic integration

18. Focus on 'impactful' Smart City projects: Centre

Context:

- Smart City Mission

In News:

- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has asked the State governments to push up implementation of

"impactful" projects.

"Impactful" projects:

- The Centre and the State governments together have identified 261 projects worth ₹32,600 crore under this category.
- Majority of these projects are in the first lot of 20 smart cities announced in January 2016.
- **Drawback:** Projects have been shortlisted without any clear definition of what "impactful" means. These projects are expected to have visible and transformative impact on the various aspects of the lives of the citizens.
- The list of "impactful" projects varies from Museum of Urban History in Bhubaneswar, to Adventure Park in Udaipur, to rejuvenation of water bodies in Coimbatore, to 5 km-long heritage walk in Warangal, to conservation of built heritage in Thanjavur, to redevelopment of world-famous Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi.

Reality of Smart City projects:

- Prime Minister has directed the Chief Secretaries to review the progress of projects on weekly basis.
- Since the list of first 20 smart cities came out on January 1, 2016, questions have been raised on the mission.
- For one, the Smart City is a misnomer, because only small pockets of the city are to be developed.
- The latest review of Smart City projects reveals that only 79 projects with total budget of Rs 841 crore have been completed. Another 204 projects, with a budget of Rs 7963 crore are under implementation.
- Projects worth Rs 1.14 lakh crore are still on the drawing board stage.

19. Centre sets up panel to suggest on new jobs

In News:

- The Central government has constituted a new task force led by NITI Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar to recommend measures to increase employment by promoting labour-intensive exports.

Terms of reference for the task force:

- To help create 'well-paid, formal sector jobs' include sector-specific policy interventions
- Measures to enhance services trade where there is high employment potential and identifying macro-economic factors holding back exports.
- Shall propose a comprehensive action plan to generate jobs as well as fix 'under-employment'.
- Ascertain the effectiveness of existing export promotion schemes and logistical or trade facilitation issues.
- Also examine how trade data can be improved so that 'it is reliable, globally comparable and timely, particularly with respect to trade in services.'

- NITI Aayog statement on employment status in India: "While the Indian workforce has high aspirations, a majority of the workers are still employed in low-productivity, low-wage jobs in small, micro and own-account enterprises. An urgent and sustained expansion of the organized sector is essential to address India's unemployment and under-employment issue."

20. State laws repugnant to IBC are void: SC

In News:

- Supreme Court ruling: "Entrenched managements are no longer allowed to continue in management if they cannot pay their debts,"
- Provisions of State enactments which hinder the country's new bankruptcy law, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), meant to protect the interests of shareholders, creditors and workmen against entrenched managements unable to dig their way out of their debts, will be declared void.
- Erstwhile management of a company cannot represent it in court once insolvency resolution process has been admitted in the National Company Law Tribunal and the management transferred to insolvency professional.

21. Govt blacklists 300,000 directors of shell companies

In News:

- The government decided to bar as many as 300,000 directors of companies that have defaulted on statutory compliances from serving on the boards of other firms to improve corporate governance and check financial irregularities through the use of shell companies.
- The ministry of corporate affairs, which regulates unlisted companies, also decided to track down the beneficial owners of suspected shell companies
- It will take penal action against those who divert funds from companies that are struck off the records of the Registrar of Companies (RoC).
- The ministry said it is also monitoring the action being taken by regulatory bodies against professionals such as chartered accountants, company secretaries and cost accountants who have been found to have colluded with the shell companies in committing financial irregularities.

Impact:

- Weeding out shell companies would not only help in checking the menace of black money but also would promote an ecosystem of 'ease of doing business' and enhancing investors' confidence
- Filing annual reports on time will minimize the possibility of fraud and tax evasion and it will also protect stakeholder interest and improve India's image globally

Basic Information:

Shell corporations:

- A shell corporation is a corporation without active business operations or significant assets.
- These types of corporations are not all necessarily illegal, but they are sometimes used illegitimately, such as to disguise business ownership from law enforcement or the public.
- Legitimate reasons for a shell corporation include such things as a startup using the business entity as a vehicle to raise funds, conduct a hostile takeover or to go public.

Reasons to legitimately set up a Shell Corporation

- The number one reason for a domestic company to set up a shell company is to realize a tax haven abroad.
- Large corporations, like in the Apple example, have decided to move jobs and profits offshore, taking advantage of looser tax codes. This is the process of "off shoring" or "outsourcing" work that was once conducted domestically.
- To remain within legal bounds internationally, corporations will set up shell companies in the foreign countries in which they are offshoring work.

22. Govt starts direct transfer of subsidized fertilizers to check diversion, smuggling

In News:

- With a view to preventing diversion of subsidized fertilizers for industrial use and their smuggling across the border, the government soft-launched the direct benefits transfer (DBT) scheme for the commodity in the national capital.
- Nationwide rollout of the scheme that could help prevent the leakage of subsidies meant for farmers.
- However, unlike in the case of liquified petroleum gas, subsidy on fertilizers will not be passed on to farmers directly as the latter cannot be forced to shell out large sums upfront for fertilizers and get bank transfers later.
- Instead, companies will sell the product at state-set prices and the government will settle the subsidy involved in every individual sale to farmers with the companies within a week of the transaction.
- The point-of-sale machines will capture sales data including the identity of the farmer, quantity of purchase, soil health details and land details where possible.
- Using this data, the government intends to limit diversion of subsidised fertilizers to other sectors such as plywood manufacture.

23. Aging population to hit Asia growth: IMF

In News:

- The International Monetary Fund chief raised a red alert: aging populations in key Asian economies would drag on their growth, urging policymakers to step up their response to shifting demographics.

Revealed by various studies:

- Asia's population is aging faster than anywhere else in the world
- **Japan forecast:** to become the first "ultra-aged" country, meaning 28% of the population is 65 or over
- **South Korea:** while a fifth of the people are expected to be 65 by 2030.
- Rapidly aging countries, including China, Japan, Korea and Thailand, "will have smaller workforces in the future and potentially lower productivity growth".
- In emerging countries such as India — where population is still growing — better education for girls and wider access to finance for women should be prioritised.
- **Gender gap and GDP:** closing the gender gap in the employment market could raise Japanese GDP by 9%, South Korea's by 10%, and India's by 27%.

24. IT & BPO sector: 'Automation may eat away 35% low-skilled jobs by 2022'**In News:**

- **Report by US- based HfS Research:** With rising adoption of automation and artificial intelligence, number of low-skilled workers in India's IT & BPO sector are expected to witness a 35 per cent decrease by 2022.
- From 2.4 million low-skilled workers in these sectors in 2016, the growing adoption of automation could cause the number of jobs to fall to 1.7 million in 2022.
- Nasscom, had earlier said that its members and their employees need to "re-skill or perish" considering the challenges on account of automation.
- New skills such as big data analytics, cloud and cyber-security services, internet-of-things, among others as areas that would create job roles going ahead.
- HfS Research noted that the number of medium skilled jobs and high-skilled jobs are expected to grow, albeit marginally.
- According to the report, Robotic Process Automation (RPA) is merely accelerating the elimination of rote jobs.

25. Current account deficit may widen to 3 per cent in April-June: Nomura**In News:**

- The country's current account deficit is likely to widen to 3 per cent in the second quarter of 2017 due to sharp deterioration in trade deficit
- In first quarter of 2017, current account deficit widened to USD 3.4 billion, or 0.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).
- It is estimated that the current account deficit widened to a four-year high of 3 per cent of GDP in the second quarter from a low of 0.6 per cent in first quarter of 2017

- Net capital inflows stood at 4-4.5 per cent of GDP in the period, led by portfolio equity and FDI inflows, resulting in a positive balance of payments surplus.
- The report said over the last two fiscal years, low commodity prices has driven the current account deficit to narrow to around 1 per cent of GDP.

Basic Information:

- Countries trade with one another to buy goods not produced in domestic economy. With the advent of globalization, investment to and fro have also increased many fold. A country's trade and other economic exchanges with the world are recorded on its external account in the form of balance of payment (BoP) transactions.

There are two components of BoP**a. Current Account****b. Capital Account**

- **Current Account** – It deals with current, ongoing, short term transactions like trade in goods, services (invisible) etc. It reflects the nation's net income.
- For instance, if you buy a laptop from US, it will be a current account transaction and it will be debit on current account as you have to pay to US.
- **There are 4 components of Current Account-**
 - i. Goods – trade in goods
 - ii. Services (invisible) – trade in services eg. tourism
 - iii. Income – investment income
 - iv. Current unilateral transfers – donations, gifts, grants, remittances
- Note that grants might appear as component of capital account but are included in current account as they are unilateral, create no liability. Recipient does not have to give anything back in return.
- **Capital Account** – It deal with capital transactions i.e. those transactions which create assets or liabilities. It reflects the net changes in the ownership of national assets.
- For instance, if you buy a stocks or property in US, it will be a capital account transaction and it will be debit on capital account as you have to pay to US to buy the asset.

Components of Capital Account

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)
- Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)
- External Borrowings such as ECB
- Reserve Account with the Central Bank
- Note here that foreign investment is under capital account but dividends and income from investment comes under current account in the category income from abroad as dividend is transferred periodically, does not result in creation of asset or liability.
- Balance of Payment (BoP) = Current Account + Capital Account = 0

Why?

- Current Account and Capital Account always balance each other because a country always has to pay for its imports. It does so by exports or other two components of current account. If it cannot, it runs deficit on current account and has to pay off by drawing off on its assets i.e. running capital account surplus.

What is Current Account Deficit?

- It's simply deficit on all 4 components of current account.
- $(\text{Export} - \text{Import}) + \text{Net income from abroad} + \text{Net Transfers}$
- $(\text{Export} - \text{Import})$ is trade deficit
- $\text{CAD} = \text{Trade Deficit} + \text{Net Income From Abroad} + \text{Net transfers}$
- Note that Trade Deficit and CAD are not one and the same. Trade deficit is only a component of CAD.

What does deficit on Current Account imply?

- If we forget income and transfers for a moment, what it means is that we import more than what we export.

How do we pay for that extra import?

- Either we get more foreign investment (FDI & FII) and pay via that or we borrow from foreign banks (ECB) or we will have to dip into our external reserves to pay for that
- amount and in the process our forex reserves come down. When forex reserves come down below a critical level, country appears on the brink of BoP crisis.

So, is CAD such a bad thing?

- Depends on what you do with those extra imports and how you finance the deficit!

CAD is bad because –

- If a CAD is financed through borrowing, it is unsustainable because borrowing lead to high interest payments in the future
- Attracting capital flows (hot money, FII) to finance the deficit is risky as when confidence falls, hot money flows dry up, leading to a rapid devaluation and crisis of confidence. Eg. East Asian Crisis
- Run a CAD necessarily means running a surplus on the capital account. This means foreigners have an increasing claim on your assets, which they could redeem any time

However a current account deficit is not necessarily harmful

- CAD during a period of inward investment particularly stable long term FDI may not be a bad things as investment can create jobs. Investments will lead to higher growth will be able to pay debts back
- Developing countries may use CAD to buy Capital goods and later export consumer goods and thus repay the debt

- Moderate current account deficit (2% of GDP) financed mainly by stable foreign investments which creates jobs and infrastructure in the economy can be helpful in the long run as it improves productivity.

What is this twin deficit?

- Current Account Deficit and Fiscal Deficit together are known as twin deficits and often both reinforce each other i.e. High fiscal deficit leads to higher CAD and vice versa.

26. 7% extra cess on SUVs; small cars exempt**Context:**

- GST council meets.
- GST Council lowers some rates, extends filing deadlines

In News:

- Deadline has been extended for filing returns.
- The Council also decided to set up a ministerial group to assess and fix the IT challenges.
- The GST rate on about 30 items of common use including idli and dosa batter, oilcakes, raincoats, rubber bands, roasted peanuts, 'dhoop agarbattis' and dried tamarind has been reduced.
- A panel of officers under Revenue Secretary has also been tasked to examine GST-related issues faced by exporters.

27. SEBI moots tighter norms for credit rating agencies**In News:**

- SEBI proposed 10 per cent cross-shareholding cap in credit rating agencies along with a slew of measures for tightening the financial and operational eligibility of their promoters.
- Besides, the regulator has suggested greater disclosure requirements by credit rating agencies (CRAs) as well as by companies getting their services
- The proposed norms are likely to have an impact on global rating agencies such as S&P, Moody's and Fitch which have significant holdings in domestic agencies besides their direct presence.
- Further, SEBI's prior approval would be needed for acquisition of shares or voting rights in a CRA that results in change in control.
- The requirement would not be applicable for holdings by broad-based domestic financial institutions.

Basic Information:**About Credit Rating:**

- Credit Rating is determined by Credit Rating agencies and is an evaluation of the debt issuers likelihood of default.
- Evaluates the credit worthiness of an issuer of specific types of debt.

28. 'Microfinance sector could treble in 4 years'

In News:

- Estimate by ICRA: the country's microfinance sector will grow nearly three-fold to reach up to Rs 4.3 trillion over the next three years on account of expansion into newer segments and enhanced average loan sizes.
- The estimate includes micro credit across self-help groups, microfinance institutions and banks.

Important observations made:

- If the ticket sizes were to double from the current levels over the next 3-4 years and MFIs were to increase their presence in under-penetrated areas, the microfinance market could reach Rs 3.3-4.3 trillion over the next 3 to 4 years. The assumption on the doubling of ticket sizes is based on improving income levels, inflation, higher eligibility of borrowers moving to higher loan cycles.
- The MFI sector, excluding Bandhan Bank and the SFBs, will need external capital of Rs 16-47 billion over the next three to four years.
- While the business opportunity is exciting, there is a need for establishing a credit culture in the new geographies and strengthening the credit appraisal processes.
- The two operational credit bureaus have helped the sector maintain its asset quality. But there are a few issues yet to be addressed like limited coverage of SHG bank linkage programme data, issues related to multiple identity cards being used by borrowers for availing loans from more than two MFIs and interlinking of retail credit.
- The overall stress of credit which is due for more than a day stood at 0.35% as of March 31, 2016, helped by regulatory decisions like data sharing through credit bureaus, cap of Rs 1 lakh for overall borrowing and the stipulation for not more than two MFIs to lend to a single borrower. However, "communal and political" incidents in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Karnataka did lead to some pressure on asset quality.
- However, the sector remains vulnerable to asset quality shocks owing to the risks associated with unsecured lending business, political risks, and operational risks arising out of cash handling.

Background:

- The Indian microfinance institution (MFI) sector grew 40% in 2015-16 to Rs 1.4 trillion as against a 38% growth in the previous fiscal, while the average ticket sizes were Rs 20-25,000.

29. Search for quality: on credit rating agencies

Context:

- SEBI has released a consultation paper seeking feedback on a new set of rules drafted to improve "market efficiency" and enhance "the governance, accountability and functioning of credit rating agencies"

New Rules:

- Provisions to restrict cross-shareholding between rating agencies without regulatory approval to 10%.
- Increase the minimum net worth requirement for existing and new agencies from Rs 5 crore to Rs 50 crore.
- There should be at least five years' experience for promoters of rating agencies.
- SEBI has proposed disclosure norms to improve investor awareness about the operations of rating agencies.
- It is to prevent rating agencies from resorting to collusion in reaching decisions.

Criticism

- The present business model of rating agencies allow considerable room for issuers of securities to shop for a favourable rating or avoid negative ratings by severing their ties with these agencies.
- Prudential regulation is thus justified to tackle this problem. This criticism, however, ignores the reputational damage these agencies suffer after each corporate default.
- But repeated failures have not affected the business of rating agencies, primarily due to the lack of alternative service providers who can help out investors.
- Individual creditors have thus had to trust the ratings of the existing rating agencies at their own peril, even after repeated crises.
- Indian credit rating market is an oligopolistic one due to the high barriers to entry.
- SEBI's proposed move to impose further quality requirements on rating agencies is unlikely to change things for the better, or raise further barriers.

Way forward:

- Make it easier for new players to enter the credit rating space and compete against incumbents.
- This will make credit rating agencies actually serve creditors rather than borrowers.

30. Inflation quickens in August, even as industrial growth sees mild recovery

Key Macro-economic stats:

- Data released by the Central Statistics Office showed Index of Industrial Production (IIP) grew at 1.2% in July from a contraction of 0.2% a month ago.
- Consumer price index based inflation continued to rise for the second consecutive month, by 3.36% from 2.36% a month ago as food inflation turned positive after three months of contraction.
- Inference: India's industrial production recovered to grow only mildly as growth in manufacturing output remained flat with introduction of goods and services tax (GST) which continued to disrupt production networks while retail inflation quickened in August ruling out any rate cut by the central bank in the near future.

31. Why India needs a bullet train

Context:

- Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe will be laying the foundation stone of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project, popularly known as the bullet train

Advantages:

- Attractive low-cost long-term financing.
- Government of Japan will provide a soft loan of about Rs 90,000 crore at an interest rate of 0.1 per cent over 50 years.
- Such loan, from other multilateral or bilateral development financing institutions, would cost between 3-7 per cent with a repayment period of 20-30 years.
- Stimulus for advanced components' manufacture and construction
- One of the stated objectives of the project is "Make in India"
- As per the agreement the MAHSR Project has "localised manufacture" and "transfer of technology" as objectives.

Employment Generation:

- This project is likely to generate employment for about 20,000 workers, who will then be equipped to take up construction of more such projects in India.
- The new areas where construction skills would be developed are ballast-less track, under sea tunneling et al.

Professional capacity-building:

- A dedicated High Speed Rail Training Institute is being developed at Vadodara.
- This institute will be fully equipped with equipment and facilities, such as a simulator, as exist in the training institute at Japan.

Speed:

- There are two types of services proposed. A "rapid train" service with only two stops — at Surat and Vadodara — and a slower service that halts at 10 stations en route.
- The "rapid train" would complete the journey in 2 hours and 7 minutes, while the slower service would take 2 hours and 58 minutes.

Cutting edge operational technology:

- The Shinkansen technology is renowned for its reliability and safety.
- The train delay record of Shinkansen is less than a minute with zero fatalities.
- The technology regarding disaster predictions and preventions will also be acquired as part of the project.

32. Corporate debt, a drag on economy

Context:

- Corporate debt and its impact on Indian Economy.

In News:

- Thomson Reuters data highlights:
- Study based on the latest annual earnings report
- India's corporate debt rose to a seven-year high at the end of March.
- More than a fifth of large companies did not earn enough to pay interest on their loans and the pace of new loans fell to the lowest in more than six decades.
- The Indian government reported that annual GDP growth in the quarter ended June dropped to 5.7. It was blamed on attempts by the government to flush out money hidden from the tax man, which caused a cash crunch, and the introduction of a general sales tax (GST), which prompted businesses and consumers to hit the pause button.

Key Stats:

- Net debt for 288 companies with a market capitalisation of more than \$500 million, covering most big firms in India, has hit at least a seven-year high of ₹18 trillion (\$281 billion).
- Soured debt was 12% of total loans held by lenders at the end of March.
- More than a fifth of 513 Indian companies had interest cover of less than 1%.
- Gross capital formation, a gauge of private investment, fell to less than 30% of GDP in the June quarter, from 31% a year earlier and 38% a decade ago.

Basic information:

- **Sour debt:** Non-performing loan on which interest is overdue and full collection of principal is uncertain. According to typical banking regulations, if interest has not been paid for 90 days the loan is put on a cash basis. Thus, its interest cannot be credited to the bank's revenue account until it has actually been received. Loans which have adequate collateral (such as home mortgages), and some types of consumer loans, are generally exempt from this requirement. Also called doubtful loan, sour loan, troubled loan.
- Capital formation is a term used to describe the net capital accumulation during an accounting period for a particular country, and the term refers to additions of capital stock, such as equipment, tools, transportation assets and electricity. Countries need capital goods to replace the current assets that are used to produce goods and services, and if a country cannot replace capital goods, production declines. Generally, the higher the capital formation of an economy, the faster an economy can grow its aggregate income.
- **Market Capitalization:** the value of a company that is traded on the stock market, calculated by multiplying the total number of shares by the present share price.

33. Slow creep

Context:

- Daily pricing of petrol and diesel policy
- Since the introduction of daily pricing of petrol, the price of petrol in Delhi has cumulatively increased by almost ₹5.

Reason for implementation:

- To ensure the benefit of lower international crude oil prices is passed on to domestic consumers.
- Real picture: comparison of crude oil prices with domestic petrol and diesel prices, suggests that this argument is far from convincing.
- **In 2012, barrel of crude:** \$120, a litre of petrol: Rs 65 in retail fuel stations.
- Today, crude basket price has dropped to around \$50, the retail price of petrol is well over the Rs 70 mark.

Earlier practice:

2010-2014:

- Deregulation of petrol and diesel pricing.
- Fuel prices to be determined primarily by the forces of supply and demand.

Reasons for the current price mismatching:

- Heavy taxes imposed on domestic fuels.
- Excise duty and value added tax are the main culprits.
- **True fact:** About half the price paid by the Indian end-consumer for petrol goes towards paying these taxes.
- The government's excise duty collection, for instance, has more than doubled during the period 2014-17, from ₹99,184 crore to ₹2,42,691 crore. This suggests quite clearly that the government, not the consumer, has been the biggest beneficiary of lower crude oil prices since 2014.

Can GST be the possible solution?

- Alternative tax such as the goods and services tax (GST), even at its highest slab of 28%, would substantially lower the current tax burden on fuels.
- Apart from making petrol and diesel more affordable to many more people in the lower rungs of the economy, it will also decrease the economic distortions caused by extraordinarily high taxes imposed on automobile fuels that are widely used.

Way forward

- Along with lower taxes, greater competition in the fuel retailing market will allow further cost efficiencies to kick in and lead to lower prices for consumers.

34. Petrol, diesel should come under GST, says Pradhan

Context:

- Daily revision in petrol and diesel prices.
- Rs 7.3 per litre spike since July

In News:

- Many States have drastically increased value-added tax.
- GST Council should consider bringing the petroleum products in the ambit of GST.

Key Fact:

- India relies on imports to meet 80% of its needs and so domestic fuel rates have been aligned to the movement of equivalent product prices in the international market since April 2002.
- Previously, the rates were changed every fortnight but since June 16 they are being revised daily.

35. 'India needs data safety reforms'

In News:

- United Nations' Resident Coordinator in India Yuri Afanasiev said :India needs regulatory reforms to protect people against fraud and misuse of data by unscrupulous elements.
- Current protocols for encrypted data transfer, from money to medical records, to be shared between many companies, people and institutions have raised questions on how this data will be stored and accessed.

36. India at 103 rank on Global Human Capital Index, lowest among BRICS nations

In News:

Global Human Capital Index

- India has been placed at a low 103 rank, the lowest among BRICS economies, on the World Economic Forum's (WEF's) Global Human Capital Index.
- India is ranked lower than its BRICS peers.
- Among the South Asian countries also, India was ranked lower than Sri Lanka and Nepal.
- The index has been topped by Norway.

Criterion adopted for Ranking

- The list takes into account "the knowledge and skills people possess that enable them to create value in the global economic system" to measure the 'human capital' rank of a country.
- Other Rankings by the WEF's survey.
- India also ranks "among the lowest in the world" when it comes to the employment gender gap.
- But has fared well when it comes to development of skills needed for the future with a rank of 65 out of total 130 countries.
- India ranks 118 for labour force participation among the key 35-54 year old demographic, it shows too many Indians are engaged in informal or subsistence employment.

37. **'Economy has to grow at 8-9% to get more people out of poverty'**

In News:

- C. Rangarajan, former chairman, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and former Governor, Reserve Bank of India in his speech at the International Conference on Finance and Economics organised by Loyola Institute of Business Administration on the topic 'Current Trends in Finance and Economics' highlights:
- If economy can grow up to 8-9% for a decade or so, the number of people below the poverty line will come down.
- The vulnerable and poor do need to be given special treatment, we need two-fold approaches: letting the economy grow fast and directly addressing the problems of the poor.
- The rural employment guarantee scheme, extension of food security were all done when the economy was strong.
- A policy intervention is needed to divert the surpluses that are generated to development.
- Growth cannot be sustained for a long time unless the population is healthy and educated. For sustained development, you need an educated population.
- The challenges ahead is to maintain a tolerable level of inflation.

38. **Centre plans to borrow for infra development**

In News:

- The Urban Affairs Ministry is planning to go for market borrowings to incentivise good performance by the States.
- This move is a bid to break the vicious cycle of low performance leading to low budgetary allocation.

39. **Exports climb 10.3% reversing 5-month slowdown**

In News:

- India's merchandise exports grew 10.3% year-on-year to \$23.8 billion in August, reversing a declining trend witnessed for five straight months.
- Data released by Commerce Ministry
- The jump in shipments was driven mainly by engineering goods, petroleum products and chemicals as well as an improvement in demand in overseas markets.

40. **Rupee, gold widen current account gap**

In News:

- April-June period: Current account deficit (CAD) widened to \$14.3 billion, 2.4% of GDP.
- In the year earlier period, the CAD was \$0.4 billion, which was 0.1% of GDP.

Reasons:

- Stronger Rupee, one of the best-performing Asian currencies in 2017 encouraged imports and

- Gold imports prior to the introduction of GST.
- Data released by the Reserve Bank of India.
- The widening of the CAD on a year-on-year basis was primarily on account of a higher trade deficit (\$41.2 billion) brought about by a larger increase in merchandise imports relative to exports.

Basic Information:

What is a 'Current Account Deficit'

- Current account deficit is a measurement of a country's trade where the value of the goods and services it imports exceeds the value of the goods and services it exports.
- The current account also includes net income, such as interest and dividends, as well as transfers, such as foreign aid, though these components make up only a small percentage of the current account when compared to exports and imports.
- The current account is essentially a calculation of a country's foreign transactions and, along with the capital account, is a component of a country's balance of payment.

41. **In a first, reserves hit \$400 billion**

In News:

- The country's foreign exchange reserves have touched \$400 billion for the first time.
- **Usage of reserve:** The reserves act as a buffer to be used in challenging times (assets to boost the import cover).

Basic Information:

FOREX:

- **Definition:** Forex reserves are foreign currency assets held by the central banks of countries.
- **Description:** These assets include foreign marketable securities, monetary gold, special drawing rights (SDRs) and reserve position in the IMF. The main purpose of holding foreign exchange reserves is to make international payments and hedge against exchange rate risks.

42. **External debt dips 2.7% to \$471.9 bn as NRI deposits fall**

Key Stats:

- India's total external debt for the financial year 2016-17 stood at \$471.9 billion, declining 2.7% from the previous year's level.
- The decline in external debt was due to the decrease in long-term debt particularly NRI deposits and commercial borrowings.
- International Debt Statistics 2017: An inter-country comparison by the World Bank, which presents the debt data for 2015, shows that India continues to be among the less vulnerable countries with its external debt indicators comparing well with other indebted developing countries.

43. Gold imports rise three-fold to \$15 bn

In News:

- Commerce Ministry data: The country's gold imports recorded a three-fold jump to \$15.24 billion during the April-August period of the current fiscal.
- Gold imports, which has a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), stood at ₹5.08 billion in April-August 2016-17.
- Surge in gold imports last month contributed to the widening of trade deficit to \$11.64 billion as against \$7.7 billion in August 2016.
- CAD rose sharply to \$14.3 billion — or 2.4% of GDP — at the end of first quarter of 2017-18. In general terms, CAD refers to the difference between inflow and outflow of foreign exchange that has an impact on exchange rate.
- Worried over surge in gold imports from South Korea, with which India has a free trade agreement, the government has restricted inbound shipments of the precious metal.

44. Shell shock: Govt. 'names and shames' directors

Context:

- Ministry of Corporate Affairs has identified 1.06 lakh directors of 'shell companies' for disqualification under the relevant provisions of the Companies Act, 2013.
- The move is part of actions to break the network of 'shell companies' and further the fight against black money/money laundering

In News:

- 'Name and shame' exercise: Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MoCA) has begun making public the lists of disqualified directors across the nation as well as those associated with struck-off companies.
- The disqualified in the lists are those who are, or had been a director, in a company that has not filed financial statements or annual returns for any continuous period of three financial years. Such directors will not be eligible for re-appointment as a director in that company or for appointment in other companies for five years from the date of non-compliance.
- Several Keralite businessmen, leading politicians, top civil servants and police officers figured in the lists.

45. RBI to regulate peer-to-peer lending firms

In News:

- As per the new notification issued by Government of India, all peer-to-peer lending (P2P) platforms will be regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- All the P2P loan platforms will be treated as non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and will be brought under the ambit of the banking regulator.

P2P lending:

- Although nascent in India and not significant in value yet, the potential benefits that P2P lending promises to various stakeholders (borrowers, lenders, agencies etc.) and its associated risks to the financial system are too important to be ignored.
- P2P lending promotes alternative forms of finance, where formal finance is unable to reach and also has the potential to soften the lending rates as a result of lower operational costs and enhanced competition with the traditional lending channels. If properly regulated, P2P lending platforms can do this more effectively
- According to RBI, P2P lending is a form of crowd funding used to raise loans which are paid back with interest. It can be defined as the use of an online platform that matches lenders with borrowers in order to provide unsecured loans.

46. Cabinet to soon take up \$5 bn convention centre project

In News:

Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (ECC):

- The Union Cabinet will soon take up the proposal for a "\$5 billion-worth world-class and state-of-the-art" ECC in the national capital.
- It will be the largest such facility in Asia when completed by 2021.
- According to the officials, the Cabinet will consider for discussion a "note on approval of the project and formation of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to implement the same".
- The SPV will be a 100% subsidiary of Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) Development Corporation

47. Private players may run rail lines

Context:

- The Union government comes up with an idea of giving operations of railway lines to private players for enhancing competition.
- Union government has decided that Railways will move from diesel to electric locomotives.

Benefits:

- Generate competition in the process and improve customer satisfaction.

Keypoints:

- Railways have decided to discard the 'Swiss Challenge' model of awarding railway stations to private players.
- Now it has taken measures to lease out at least 100 stations.
- The lease tenure presently is increased from 45 years to 99 years, allowing private players to sub-lease stations for increasing their investment value and mortgaging assets to allow banks to give low-cost funds.

- Mission behind the privatization of the railway operations also looks into 100% electrification.
- The Railways are investing ₹16,000 crore every year in diesel consumption. So, This move will save ₹8,000-10,000 crore.
- Railways decided to abandon plans to set up a diesel locomotive plant in Marhowrah district of Bihar.

48. Govt's 1st estimate sees kharif food output dropping 2.8% to 134.67 mt

In News:

- The 2017 kharif foodgrain output may come down to 134.67 million tonnes (mt) from a record harvest of 138.52 mt during the previous kharif season.
- **Reasons:** Floods and erratic rainfall in different parts of the country.
- The drop in output was seen across all major rain-fed crops except sugarcane.
- Sugarcane registered a nearly 10 per cent increase in cropping area and a corresponding increase in output.

Impacts:

- It may have an impact on farm incomes, which will be lower because of lower output.
- This would mean that the demand for other goods in rural areas will not recover the way the government was hoping it would.
- In other words, despite having two good monsoon in a row, private consumption expenditure will not go up and thus may have an impact on the overall economy.

49. Database of savings schemes linked with Aadhaar in offing

In News:

- The Cabinet Secretariat is keen on a central database of government and private sector employees who have subscribed to the general provident fund (GPF), public provident fund (PPF) and employees' provident fund (EPF) with Aadhaar as the primary identifier.
- It has directed the various departments monitoring such savings schemes to ensure that 100% Aadhaar seeding of all salaried accounts takes place by December 31.

Key Fact:

- EPF is the savings scheme for private sector employees.
- The GPF is meant for government employees and
- PPF can be subscribed to by all workers.

50. PM Modi sets up advisory council under Bibek Debroy to monitor economic growth

Context:

- PM Modi announced the constitution of a five-member Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) under the chairmanship of Bibek Debroy, member Niti Aayog.

Reasons:

- To keep a closer eye on economic developments and seek advisory on addressing macroeconomic and other important issues.
- The constitution of the EAC-PM, comes amidst growing concerns over the pace of growth in the economy and the slow pace of job creation.
- In the quarter April to June 2017, the GDP growth fell to 5.7 per cent from 7.9 per cent in the corresponding period last year.
- Government data shows that the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), has been struggling to achieve end-results.

Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)

- It is an independent body to give advice on economic and related issues to the Government of India, specifically to the prime minister.
- The terms of reference of EAC includes
- To analyse any issue, economic or otherwise, referred to it by the prime minister and advising him thereon;
- To address issues of macroeconomic importance and presenting views thereon to the prime minister.

51. ADB lowers India growth outlook to 7% for 2017-18

In News:

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has slashed India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal to 7 per cent from 7.4 per cent.
- **Reasons:** Weakness in private consumption, manufacturing output, and business investment has resulted in lowering the short-term growth outlook for the country.
- India's growth fell to a 3-year low of 5.7 per cent in the April-June quarter of 2017-18 "due to lingering effects from demonetization and transitory challenges related to the new goods and services tax (GST) regime.
- Manufacturing is also likely to bounce back as the sector adjusts to the new tax regime.

52. Sebi may allow mutual funds to trade in commodity derivatives

In News:

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is planning to allow mutual funds to trade in commodity derivatives.
- Portfolio management services and foreign trading houses that export or import from India could also be allowed to participate in commodity futures.
- Such a move will help deepen the market and provide hedging opportunities to large companies.
- The regulator also plans to let even foreign institutional investors after a regulatory framework is put in place.
- In June 2017, the markets regulator had allowed category III Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs) to invest in commodity derivatives.

Basic Information:

- **Mutual Funds:** A mutual fund is a professionally-managed investment scheme, usually run by an asset management company that brings together a group of people and invests their money in stocks, bonds and other securities.

Derivatives

- Derivatives are products whose value is derived from the value of one or more basic variables, which are called Underlying Assets.
- The underlying asset can be equity, index, foreign exchange (Forex), commodity or any other asset. This means that any instrument that derives its value on its underlying equity, index, foreign exchange (Forex), commodity or any other asset, is a Derivative Instrument.

53. New tax, rule may 'aid' gold smuggling**Context:**

- Gold smuggling in India.
- India is the world's second-biggest consumer of the metal.
- Gold import is likely to rise during the country's peak holiday season as buyers try to avoid paying a new sales tax and to dodge new transparency rules
- Unaccounted sale will rise in the festive season as some customers are trying to buy without bills

In News:**Background information:**

- In August, India moved to include gold sales under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
- The law makes it mandatory for jewellers to keep records of customers' personal identification numbers or tax code number for transactions above ₹50,000.

Key Fact:

- Indian gold demand typically rises in the last three months of the year as consumers buy more for the wedding season as well as for festivals such as Diwali and Dussehra.
- The World Gold Council estimate: India imported 120 tonnes of gold in 2016.
- In India, less than 4% of the people pay income tax. Many tax evaders choose to park their illicit wealth in gold as it is nearly as liquid as currency in the country.

Present scenario:

- The sales tax on gold rose to 3% from 1.2 % as part of a new nationwide sales tax regime that started on July 1.
- Jewellers are buying smuggled gold at discount in cash, then making jewellery and selling it to consumers without receipts.

54. 'Panel to review industrial policy hurdles'**In News:**

- The Centre will soon set up a 'regulatory review committee'.
- **Reason:** to address policy-related roadblocks and other factors inhibiting the country's industrial growth
- It will also address issues halting 'ease of doing business' and private investments.
- The government is also thinking about a new mechanism to monitor domestic and foreign investment proposals.
- The idea is to fast-track decisions on such proposals, in coordination with State governments and the Centre's investment facilitation and promotion arm, 'Invest India'.

Industry's unutilized capacity:

- The Centre is looking at ways to ensure use of the industry's unutilised capacity.
- Currently, the country-wide average unutilised capacity is about 26% (In other words, average utilisation of industrial capacity is only 74%).
- Measures will soon be taken soon to increase domestic demand as well as boost exports to ensure the entire capacity is utilized.

55. India Ratings cuts GDP estimate citing demonetisation, GST**In News:**

- India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) an arm of global rating agency Fitch has cut India's GDP growth forecast to 6.7% from earlier expected 7.4% in the current fiscal.

Reasons:

- Because of the disruptive impact of demonetisation and the new GST
- After demonetisation, failing to remonetise the economy quickly has proved fatal for the unorganised sector/small and medium enterprise where business transactions are heavily cash dependent
- India's GDP growth has been in a free fall since the first quarter of the last fiscal year.

Basic Information:**India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra)**

- It is India's Most Respected credit rating agency committed to providing the India's credit markets with accurate, timely and prospective credit opinions.
- Ind-Ra currently maintains coverage of corporate issuers, financial institutions, which includes banks and insurance companies. Finance & leasing companies and managed funds, Urban Local Bodies, Structured Finance and Project Finance.
- Ind-Ra is headquartered in Mumbai and, it is a 100% owned subsidiary of the Fitch Group.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA-PAKISTAN

1. India rejects OIC comment on Kashmir

In News:

- India has rejected Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) statement on Jammu and Kashmir, saying it "contains factually incorrect and misleading references."
- India also said the group has no locus standi on India's internal affairs.
- India, in its response to the statement made by Pakistan on behalf of OIC, India said J&K is its integral and inseparable part.
- The Permanent Mission of India at Geneva tweeted: "OIC has no locus standi on our internal affairs. Strongly advise refrain from making such references in future," the Permanent Mission of India at Geneva tweeted.

Basic Information:

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation:

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states, with a collective population of over 1.6 billion as of 2008.
- The organisation states that it is "the collective voice of the Muslim world" and works to "safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony".
- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union. The official languages of the OIC are Arabic, English, and French.

2. Indus water talks make no headway

Context:

Indus Water Treaty.

- Second round of discussions between India and Pakistan on the Ratle and Kishanganga hydroelectric projects took place at the World Bank headquarters

In News:

- World Bank: The latest round of talks between India and Pakistan on the Indus Waters Treaty has ended without any agreement.
- World Bank said it will continue to work with complete impartiality to resolve the issues in an amicable manner.

Islamabad's objection:

- Ratle and Kishanganga hydroelectric projects: Islamabad has raised objections.

World Banks response:

- World Bank will continue to work with both countries to resolve the issues in an amicable manner and in line with the Treaty provisions.
- The World Bank remains committed to act in good faith and with "complete impartiality and transparency" in fulfilling its responsibilities under the Treaty, while continuing to assist the countries

Basic Information:

The Indus Waters Treaty

- The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank (then the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development).
- The treaty was signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960 by Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and President of Pakistan Ayub Khan.
- According to this agreement, control over the three "eastern" rivers — the Beas, the Ravi and the Sutlej — was given to India, while control over the three "western" rivers — the Indus, the Chenab and the Jhelum — to Pakistan.
- More controversial, however, were the provisions on how the waters were to be shared. Since Pakistan's rivers flow through India first, the treaty allowed India to use them for irrigation, transport and power generation, while laying down precise regulations for Indian building projects along the way.
- The treaty was a result of Pakistani fear that, since the source rivers of the Indus basin were in India, it could potentially create droughts and famines in Pakistan, especially at times of war.

INDIA-SWITZERLAND

1. India thanks Switzerland for support in global fora

Context:

- Swiss President Doris Leuthard, on a three day visit to India.

In News:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought greater cooperation to ensure bilateral financial transparency.
- Swiss government was thanked by Modi, for its support to India's membership bid for the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

Joint statement:

- Switzerland has supported India's continued quest for membership in the Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement.

- Agreements signed: signed two major agreements on railways.

Basic Information:

The Australia Group:

- The Australia Group is an informal group of countries (now joined by the European Commission) established in 1985 (after the use of chemical weapons by Iraq in 1984) to help member countries to identify those exports which need to be controlled so as not to contribute to the spread of chemical and biological weapons.
- It now has 42 members, including the European Commission, all 28 member states of the European Union, Ukraine, and Argentina.
- The name comes from Australia's initiative to create the group. Australia manages the secretariat.

The 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.

The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR):

- The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) is a multilateral export control regime. It is an informal and voluntary partnership among 35 countries to prevent the proliferation of missile and unmanned aerial vehicle technology capable of carrying above 500 kg payload for more than 300 km.
- India formally applied for membership to the group in June 2015, with active support from France and the United States, and officially became a member on 27 June 2016 with the consensus of the 34 member nations.

INDIA-SRI LANKA

1. Sushma Swaraj meets Sirisena, discusses progress on Indian projects

Context:

- External Affairs Minister visit to Sri Lanka, to participate in the Indian Ocean Conference organised by the India Foundation.

In News:

Discussed Issues:

- The delay in the Constitution making process: Sri Lanka urged New Delhi to use its good offices to support the government see the process through.
- Delay in implementing India-backed projects in the island.
- India assured continued and fullest support to the Sri Lankan government: The national unity government led by President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe - from the rival parties SLFP and UNP - is under pressure. It faces large scale corruption allegations in addition to a challenge from the SLFP faction led by former strongman Mahinda Rajapaksa, who has vowed to topple the government.

India's project:

- Joint development of a World War-era oil tank in the strategically located eastern port town of Trincomalee.
- India has expressed its interest to operate Sri Lanka's second international airport in Mattala.

INDIA-SWEDEN

1. Adani, SAAB tie up to build fighter jets

Context:

Collaboration with SAAB

- The Adani group has announced a collaboration with Swedish defence major SAAB to manufacture Gripen fighter jets in India, if selected.
- However, the partnership would be possible if Adani being shortlisted in the evaluation process.
- **Why this collaboration:** Indian Government is going to issue a multibillion dollar tender for over a 100 single engine fighter jets.

Particulars of the Tender

- IAF is expected to begin the process in the next few months for a single engine fighter aircraft to replace the Russian Mig-21s and Mig-27s in service.
- The procurement would be under the recently promulgated Strategic Partnership (SP) model of the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP).
- The deal for 100 plus fighter aircraft is estimated to be worth over Rs. 60,000 crore.

INDIA-CHINA

1. Modi and Xi flag 'forward looking' ties after the close of the Doklam crisis

Context:

- 9th BRICS summit
- Venue: Xiamen, China
- India – China bilateral talks.

In News:

- Highlights of the discussions held between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of BRICS summit:
- India and China decided to open a new “forward looking” round of engagement, anchored by fresh mechanisms to ensure calm at the borders.
- **Main focus:** more on border Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), rather than on fresh ideas to resolve the festering boundary dispute between the two countries.
- Two leaders agreed that efforts should be made to ensure that “defence and security (personnel) must maintain strong contact and cooperation” at the borders.

Basic Information:

BRICS:

- BRICS is the acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- Originally the first four were grouped as “BRIC” (or “the BRICs”), before the induction of South Africa in 2010.
- The BRICS members are all leading developing or newly industrialized countries, but they are distinguished by their large, sometimes fast-growing economies and significant influence on regional affairs; all five are G-20 members.
- The term does not include countries such as South Korea, Mexico and Turkey for which other acronyms and group associations were later created.
- Financial structure: Currently, there are two components that make up the financial architecture of BRICS, namely, the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). Both of these components were signed into treaty in 2014 and became active in 2015.

New Development Bank:

- The New Development Bank (NDB) is based in Shanghai.
- The New Development Bank (NDB), formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank, is a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states.
- The bank's primary focus of lending will be infrastructure projects with authorized lending of up to \$34 billion annually.

- South Africa will be the African Headquarters of the Bank named the “New Development Bank Africa Regional Centre”.
- The bank will have starting capital of \$50 billion, with capital increased to \$100 billion over time.
- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa will initially contribute \$10 billion each to bring the total to \$50 billion.

BRICS CRA:

- The BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) is a framework for providing protection against global liquidity pressures.
- This includes currency issues where members' national currencies are being adversely affected by global financial pressures.
- It is found that emerging economies that experienced rapid economic liberalization went through increased economic volatility, bringing uncertain macroeconomic environment.
- The CRA is generally seen as a competitor to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and along with the New Development Bank is viewed as an example of increasing South-South cooperation.
- It was established in 2015 by the BRICS countries Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- The legal basis is formed by the Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, signed at Fortaleza, Brazil on 15 July 2014.

2. Open to talks on reopening Nathu La for Kailash pilgrims: China

In News:

Reopening of Nathu La

- China indicated that it is ready to continue communication with India over reopening Nathu La in Sikkim to facilitate the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage
- The route was closed in June following tension over the Doklam standoff.
- According to the agreement reached between the two leaders and based on the fact that the western section of the India-China boundary has been recognised by the two sides, China opened the pass to the Indian pilgrims
- The Sikkim route to Mansarovar was opened in 2015

Hydrological data:

- In August, the Ministry of External Affairs had stated that India had not received hydrological data from China this year
- Regarding sharing hydrological data with India on the Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers, China said that it was not possible as data stations in Tibet were being upgraded.

- Under a bilateral mechanism established in 2006, China is expected to share hydrological data on the two rivers during the flood season between May 15 and June 15.
- China will start providing data again depending on the progress of the ongoing work
- The hydrological data is used to anticipate the flow of water from the upper riparian states into India and Bangladesh and deal with flooding.
- China has been building major dams on the Brahmaputra river to generate hydel power. It operationalised Zangmu hydroelectric project in October 2015 and three more are under construction.

INDIA-MYANMAR

1. PM Modi reaches Myanmar for first bilateral visit, to meet Suu Kyi tomorrow

Context:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar.

In News:

- First bilateral visit to Myanmar.
- **Aim:** to chart out a roadmap for closer cooperation between the two countries in areas like security and counter-terrorism, trade and investment, infrastructure and energy, and culture.

Key fact:

- Strategic importance: Myanmar shares a 1,640-km-long border with a number of northeastern states.

2. Modi gives call to respect Myanmar's integrity

Context:

- Ongoing, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral visit to Myanmar.

In News:

- India's moral support: India shares Myanmar's concerns over "extremist violence" in the Rakhine State, from where 1,25,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged all the stakeholders to find a solution that respects the country's unity.
- Mr. Narendra Modi, held wide-ranging talks with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. Highlighted the need to maintain the security and stability of the land and maritime boundaries of the two countries.
- 11 agreements were signed between the two sides in areas like maritime security, strengthening democratic institutions in Myanmar, health and information technology.

3. India refuses to join declaration against Myanmar at international meet

'World Parliamentary Forum on Sustainable Development':

- Venue: Indonesia
- Bali Declaration and reference to violence in Rakhine State: "Call on all parties to contribute to the restoration of stability and security, exercise maximum self-restraint from using violent means, respect the human rights of all people in Rakhine State regardless of their faith and ethnicity, as well as facilitate and guarantee safe access for humanitarian assistance."

India's Stance:

- An Indian parliamentary delegation, led by Speaker Lok Sabha Sumitra Mahajan, dissociated itself from the 'Bali Declaration'.
- The declaration adopted at the conclusion of the Forum, was not in line with the agreed global principles of 'sustainable development'
- India reiterated its stance that the purpose of convening the Parliamentary forum was to arrive at mutual consensus for implementation of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) which requires inclusive and broad-based development processes
- India said, "Never before 'country-specific' issues have been included in the declaration as these dilute the objective of these Forums which require unity and focused efforts of all the countries,"

Basic Information:

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), officially known as Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a set of 17 "Global Goals" with 169 targets between them.
- Spearheaded by the United Nations through a deliberative process involving its 193 Member States.

4. Rohingya refugee issue: Dhaka plea made MEA shift stand

Context:

- Rohingya's deportation issue.
- India's shift in position on the Myanmar issue:
- India-Myanmar joint statement during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit: didn't include any reference to the refugee situation.
- India has now expressed deep concerns about the outflow of Rohingya refugees for the first time in recent month. It was prompted by a series of requests from the Bangladesh government at the highest levels.

INDIA-IRAN

1. 'Undersea line from Iran to port cheap gas'

Context:

- Iran-India gas pipeline study:
- A 1,300-km undersea pipeline from Iran, avoiding Pakistani waters, can bring natural gas from the Persian Gulf to India at rates less than the price of LNG available in the spot market.
- Cheaper fuel: Natural gas imported through the more than \$4-billion pipeline would cost \$5-5.50 per million British thermal unit at the Indian coast, cheaper than the rate at which some of the domestic fields supply gas.
- Cheaper than the ones which are shipped: Liquefied natural gas, or LNG, imported through ships costs about \$7.50 per million British thermal unit.
- The cost of landed gas through an undersea pipeline will be at least \$2 cheaper than importing LNG, saving about \$1 billion annually.
- The pipeline is planned to carry 31.5 million standard cubic meters gas per day. The pipeline can first travel to Oman, and then onwards to Porbandar in the state of Gujarat.

Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline:

- The subsea pipeline is being seen as an alternative to the on-land, Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline
- New Delhi has not been participating in talks on the 1,036-km Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline since 2007 citing security and commercial concerns. But, it has never officially pulled out of the \$7.6 billion project.

INDIA-JAPAN

1. India, Japan to diversify defence ties

Context:

- Annual defence ministerial meeting in Tokyo.

In News:

- India and Japan agreed on a range of initiatives to diversify and deepen their defence cooperation.
- **Focus Areas:** anti-submarine warfare, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and technological cooperation.
- The defence Ministers of both the country exchanged views and ideas with the aim of further strengthening defence and security cooperation under the framework of the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership.

2. Firm signal on bullet train project

Context:

- **Annual summit meeting:** between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

- **Venue:** Gandhinagar, State of Gujarat.
- Fourth annual summit

Focus:

- The high point of the visit was likely to be the joint inauguration of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail project and bilateral security dialogue.
- Review the recent progress in the multifaceted cooperation between India and Japan under the framework of their 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership' and will set its future direction.

Defence and security:

- India-Japan ties are at a crucial phase in a range of areas, including defence and security.
- **Annual defence dialogue:** the two countries had resolved to collaborate closely in defence production, including on dual-use technologies.

3. A push for cooperation in S&T and medical research

Context:

- Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India.

In News:

- Agreements signed: cooperation in science and technology, including research into stem-cells for making bone-marrow transplants more accessible.
- The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) already has an India-Japan cooperative programme that has Christian Medical College & Hospital, Vellore, and Kyoto University, Japan, as participants.
- The aim of the programme is to develop infrastructure and expertise for India to be a competitive force in regenerative medicine and induced pluripotent stem cell biology.
- The focus of the collaboration is on developing treatments for sickle-cell anaemia, Beta thalassemia and brain disorders, and creating a haplobank relevant to Indian population.

What is a haplobank?

- Haplobank refers to a specially maintained collection of embryonic cells that can, in theory, be directed to become any kind of cell and thus progenitor of replacement organs.

4. N. Korea: Japan draws in India

Context:

- Japan's Prime Minister visit to India

In News:

- Strategic Convergence:
- India and Japan asked North Korea to shut down its nuclear and missile programmes.
- India and Japan, both hinted at Pakistan's past involvement with North Korean nuclear and missile programmes and sought accountability of "all parties" who helped Pyongyang acquire nuclear technology.

Cross-border terrorism:

- Japan promised to help India deal with cross-border terrorism: support can be provided both indirectly in international platforms or directly to deal with organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Islamic State
- A joint statement issued after the summit sought the implementation of Resolution 1267 of the UN Security Council to counter cross-border terrorism.

Japan's focus on Northeast States:

- Japan, at present, has two infrastructure projects in Meghalaya and Mizoram and more projects are likely to be added to the list after feasibility studies.

Expanded Maritime cooperation:

- Maritime cooperation between the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) and the Indian Navy had expanded to include 'anti-submarine aspects'.
- India and Japan, both agreed to support small islands in the region as part of their common strategy.

Joint Exercise:

- Expansion of joint exercises in areas of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR), peacekeeping operations and counter-terrorism, which will also include joint field exercises between the Japanese and Indian land forces next year.

5. 'Fly' on train from Mumbai by 2022**In News:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe laid the foundation stone in Ahmedabad for the country's first Rs. 1,10,000 crore, 508 km high-speed rail project between Mumbai and Ahmedabad.
- The ambitious project is being implemented with nearly 90% financial support and technology from Japan.
- **Key Fact:** To be built on elevated corridor with a seven-km undersea tunnel in Mumbai, the project will be based on the famed Japanese Shinkansen high-speed railway system with a record of zero casualties in its 50 years of operation.
- **Dead line for completion:** August 15, 2022, the day when India marks 75 years of Independence.
- The project will be executed through a special purpose vehicle, the National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd.
- India's Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd and Japan's Kawasaki Heavy Industries Ltd will tie up for manufacturing the rolling stock for bullet train project.
- A training centre in Vadodara is being set up to train over 4,000 employees who will be responsible for execution, operation and maintenance of the bullet train.

- The project will cover 12 stations — Mumbai, Thane, Virar, Boisar, Vapi, Bilimora, Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, Anand, Ahmedabad and Sabarmati — and once operational, the train is expected to service 1.5 crore travellers a year.

6. Five challenges in the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project**Context:**

- Construction of the first bullet train between Ahmedabad and Mumbai is happening on 14 September at a function attended by Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe
- It is a major leap in infrastructure development in India, this project signifies the friendship and collaboration between India and Japan

Specialties:

- The 534-km Rs1 trillion high-speed rail project will operate trains with average speeds of 200-250kmph
- It will be a game-changer in terms of inter-urban connectivity and establish India as a market for such technologies
- Japan is providing a loan that would cover 80% of the estimated project cost at 5% interest, with a 15-year moratorium followed by a 35-year payback period.

Challenges**Route design which would include questions like:**

- Detailed alignment choice, especially when it is over ground, keeping in view land acquisition challenges versus providing access to the population along the corridor.
- Generate urban growth around the station, and even shift the centre of gravity of the urban area.
- **Number of stations:** Demand for more stations would increase the catchment and reduce the average speed due to higher number of stops. One option is to have different service categories like fast (stopping at all stations) and super-fast (only at major cities).

Evacuation facilitation:

- Efficient bus services as well as accessible parking lots for private vehicles should be provided.
- At major stations, where passengers could move to other trains, the transfer must be seamless.

Land acquisition:

- This will be a critical issue, especially where the alignment would veer off from existing railway lands.
- It would be best addressed by the line going over ground, where the actual acquisition would be limited

Human resource development:

- It would be important to train a large number of Indian engineers and managers for design, construction and operations at standards that would be essential for high speed rail, including for stringent safety standards

Future expansion:

- It would be useful to have a perspective on how the expansion of this line would happen.

7. Japan calls for 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy'**Context:**

- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India.
- Announcement of Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

In News:

- During the visit Shinzo Abe highlighted the country's intensifying focus on the Indo-Pacific region and Tokyo's evolving foreign policy.

Japan's new concept- "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy":

- Aims to prepare Japan to deal with the fast changing global and regional order and threats from China and North Korea.
- Strategy aims to create a "free and open" Asia-Pacific region which connects parts of eastern Africa, south Asia and southeast Asia with the western Pacific Ocean region and Japan.
- The 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' rests on "two oceans" — Indian and Pacific — and "two continents" — Africa and Asia.
- Connectivity between Asia and Africa through a free and open Indo-Pacific, is expected to support stability and prosperity of the region.
- Inference: by connecting "two oceans" and "two continents", Japan is quietly challenging China's aggressive plans in the South China Sea that pose a threat to the energy lane that sustains Japanese economy.

8. Three isn't a crowd**Context:**

- India-Japan Special Strategic and Global partnership summit, and the highlights of the Joint statement between India and Japan.

Concerns about China

- Even though the Doklam issue is resolved, it can happen again on the long unsettled border between the two countries, at a place and time of China's choosing.
- Japan, which has its own troubles with China over territory, was the only country that openly articulated its support for India during those two troubled months.
- Shinzo Abe recalled Japan's own experience with China's claims over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands as "very challenging".
- BRICS summit in Xiamen, China, where two Pakistan-based terror groups with animus toward India, Lashkar and Jaish, were named in the resolution.

Highlights of the joint-statement:

- It calls for a "rules-based order" in the Indo-Pacific region where "sovereignty and international law are respected, and differences resolved through dialogue.
- And all countries, large or small, enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight, sustainable development, and a free, fair and open trade and investment system.
- It took a swipe at China's OBOR initiative by calling for transparency in the development of connectivity and infrastructure development in the region.
- It reaffirmed the India-Japan project to connect Africa and Asia.
- The statement condemns North Korea, but for the first time, includes "the importance of holding accountable all parties" that helped that country develop its nuclear programme.

The defence and security co-operation

- Malabar joint exercise the most high-profile representation of this.
- A new chapter of co-operation in relations in all spheres, from terrorism, defence, the bullet train, infrastructure development to nuclear co-operation.

9. Japan keen on friendship with northeast**Context:**

- Tokyo will invest in infrastructure, education and people-to-people sectors, apart from inviting 25 youth from region to the country this year.

Keypoints:

- Decision was taken in the fourth Northeast Connectivity Summit in Kohima.
- The next edition of the summit will be held in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, which borders China.
- Japan had undertaken works on road connectivity, energy projects, water supply and sanitation, forest resources management, Japanese language education and post-war reconciliation, which aimed to build a deeper understanding of the actions of Japanese forces in the region during the Second World War.
- Tokyo was committed to undertaking two major road and infrastructure building projects in Mizoram and Meghalaya.
- The summit included diplomatic participation from Bhutan, Russia, Bangladesh, Laos and Thailand.

Reason behind Japanese cooperation in the development of the region:

- Northeastern region is located at a strategically and economically important juncture between India and Southeast Asia as well as within the Bimstec (Bay of Bengal) community.

Myanmar's interest

- Myanmar's Minister of Cultural Affairs urged people from Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur to forge closer ties with Myanmar as the country shared long borders with all four States.
- Indian side urged improved connectivity with Myanmar for unlocking the regional trade potential.

INDIA- U.S.

1. U.S. backs sale of fighters to India**Context:**

- The Trump administration has told the U.S. Congress that it "strongly supports" the sale of F-18 and F-16 fighter planes to India.
- President Donald Trump is in principle against companies relocating facilities abroad.
- Fighter planes built by American companies Boeing and Lockheed Martin respectively.
- Both companies have offered to assemble these planes in India.

Move to reduce Trade deficit:

- The deals could reduce America's trade deficit with India and create more jobs in America than they relocate
- Strategic significance: Defense cooperation with India is so vital to U.S. interests because U.S. need India to be a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key Fact:

- **Single engine fighter acquisition:** F-16 and Gripen, built by Swedish company Saab, are competing.
- Twin engine fleet for aircraft carriers: French Rafale and Boeing's F/A-18 are competing
- Lockheed Martin and Tata have formed a joint venture to make F-16, while Saab announced a JV with the Adani group last week for Gripen.

2. India, U.S. in talks for C-17 deal**In News:**

- India is in talks with the U.S. for buying another Boeing C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft to be added to its fleet of 10.
- Since induction in 2013, the aircraft has become the mainstay of India's humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts.

Importance:

- The proposed sale will improve India's capability to meet the current and future strategic airlift requirements.
- India lies in a region prone to natural disasters and will use the additional capability [aircraft] for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

3. 'America wants growing trade with India'**Context:**

- **India - America:** rising imbalance in trade with India is a concern for America.

In News:**U.S. Commerce Secretary Observations:**

- India must open its market to more American companies.
- India must also take more effective measures to protect innovation by improving its intellectual property protections.

New 2+2 format:

- India and the U.S have decided to move to the 2+2 format of engagement involving the Secretaries of Defence and State Departments from the American side and Ministers for Defence and External Affairs Ministers from the Indian side.

Key Facts:

- Annual bilateral trade between the U.S. and India has doubled over the last decade and was \$114 billion in 2016. Unfortunately, over the same period, trade deficit tripled, now at \$27 billion
- India's investors invested \$12.1 billion in the U.S. last year, U.S. investors invested \$32.9 billion in India.
- 1.5 % of U.S. exports were to India, while only 6.3 % of Indian exports goes to America.

4. US Senate passes \$700 billion defence spending bill**Context:**

- The US Senate has overwhelmingly approved the nearly \$700 billion defence spending bill for 2018.
- Bill seeks to develop a strategy for Indo-US defence cooperation and adopts a tough approach on Pakistan's action against terror outfits like the Haqqani network and the LeT.
- As part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2018, the legislation also approved several India-centric amendments aimed at increasing the defence relationship between the two countries and thus enhancing the strategic partnership between the two countries.

Provisions relating to India:

- An amendment that calls on the Department of Defense to reassess its approach to partnering with India and to appoint an individual to oversee this process.
- Another amendment which asks the Pentagon to develop a strategy of defence cooperation between the US and India.

Provisions relating to Pakistan

- The bill approves \$700 million in coalition support fund to Pakistan as a reimbursement to the services rendered by Islamabad towards America's fight against terrorism.

- However, \$350 million of this amount cannot be released unless the Defense Secretary certifies to the Congress that Pakistan has taken satisfactory steps against terrorist organizations like the Haqqani network and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)
- Pakistan is required not provide military, financial or logistical support to specially designated global terrorists operating in Afghanistan or Pakistan.
- Along with this Pakistan must show that is not using its military or any funds or equipment provided by the US to persecute minority groups seeking political or religious freedom, including the Balochi, Sindhi and Hazara ethnic groups and minority religious groups, including Christian, Hindu and Ahmadiyya Muslims, it said.

INDIA- BHUTAN

1. Debt, project delays worry Bhutan

Context:

Bhutan concerns on Indian projects

- Bhutan wants more focus of India on issues like hydropower project constructions.
- According to Bhutanese experts, Hydropower projects are critical for the Bhutanese economy and are at the core of Bhutan's plans for self-reliance ever since the first five-year plans in 1961.

Rising Debt of Bhutan:

- As of July 2017, Bhutan's debt to India for the three major ongoing projects: Mangdechhu, Punatsangchhu 1 and 2.
- It is approximately 12,300 crore which accounts for 77% of the country's total debt, and is 87% of its GDP
- The cost of the 720 MW Mangdechhu project has nearly doubled in the past two years.
- Both Punatsangchhu 1 and 2, each of 1200 MW capacity have trebled in cost and been delayed more than five years over the original completion schedule.

Indian Government stance:

- The Indian government is looking at the proposals of the hydropower committee of Bhutan.
- But accepted that it would be difficult to meet many of them, given India's own power sector needs to compete in the same area.

INDIA-AFGHANISTAN

1. India to further aid Afghan troops

Context:

- India- Afghanistan Partnership Council meeting.
- Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) was signed in 2011.
- Second meeting since 2011.

In News:

- India agreed to enhance existing assistance to Afghan security forces, including in capacity building and training of Afghan soldiers in India
- Afghanistan's Foreign Minister suggested a larger role for India in regional diplomacy.
- **New scholarships:** External Affairs Minister of India announced 500 new scholarships for children and kin of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) to honour their sacrifices for the cause of entire humanity and ensuring the safety of Indians working in Afghanistan.

2. India steps up development partnership with Afghanistan

Context:

- US President Donald Trump urged India to do more in Afghanistan on "economic assistance and development"

India – Afghanistan development partnership

- India stepped up its development partnership and committed to 116 new projects in Afghanistan
- The projects will be in the areas of education, health, agriculture, irrigation, drinking water, renewable energy, flood control, micro-hydropower, sports infrastructure and administrative infrastructure.
- New Delhi also agreed to strengthen security cooperation and pointed out that the countries must stay united in dealing with the challenge posed by "cross-border terrorism" – an oblique reference to Pakistan.
- India agreed to extend further assistance for the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in fighting the scourge of terrorism, organized crime, trafficking of narcotics and money laundering
- The two sides also signed four pacts, including one on vehicular movement to boost overland transit and another on a fresh batch of development projects by India in Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan strongly supports India's membership of the UN Security Council and other groupings and hoped that it would back Kabul's entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

3. Afghan overture

Context:

- India's decision to expand security assistance to Kabul has a nuanced geopolitical message.

Keypoints:

- India's plans to expand its security assistance to Afghanistan by training police officers in India as part of a UNDP project.
- By training police officers and hundreds of army cadets and officers, India is taking an important role in capacity building for Afghan security.
- The second message, to Pakistan and other countries in the region that deal with the Taliban, is that India will not be deterred from assisting Afghanistan for its security. This is a clear counter to Pakistan Prime Minister S.K. Abbasi's recent statement that India has "zero political and military role" in Afghanistan.
- New Delhi's decision to send Indian engineers to refurbish several non-functional Soviet-era planes and to repair the helicopters India donated to Afghanistan last year also comes in the wake of this commitment.
- Third, there is a message to the U.S. and NATO forces, India will play a part in putting Afghanistan back on its feet in India's own way and not necessarily, as the U.S. may prefer, with 'boots on the ground' or by sending large numbers of trainers into Afghanistan, where they would become marked targets.

4. Mattis may push for Indian troops in Afghanistan

In News:

- U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis landed in India, for his maiden three-day visit
- Key fact:** the first visit by a Cabinet member of the Trump administration.

Key areas of focus:

- Deepening the defence partnership and expand the high technology cooperation under the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI).
- Afghanistan situation discussions.
- Push for Indian troops in Afghanistan.
- The two sides could also discuss the new Chinese posturing in the region and terrorism originating from Pakistan.
- The two sides are expected to conclude the formal agreement for holding a bilateral maritime exercise, focused on providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Indian aid to Afghanistan:

- India has already extended a \$3-billion aid to Afghanistan and also provides training to its military and other assistance.

5. India signs MoU to train Afghan police

In News:

- New memorandum of understanding signed between India and Afghanistan.

Key points:

- Afghan police forces trained in India for the first time.
- MoU on Technical Cooperation on Police Training and Development will see India expand its capacity building of Afghan troops to include policemen and security forces, who are facing the brunt of Taliban attacks in the country, under a United Nations Development Programme project.

INDIA-RUSSIA

1. Indo-Russian war games in Oct.

In News:

- The Indra Exercise: India and Russia have begun discussions to work out the modalities for their first tri-service military exercise to be held in October.
- Key fact: It will also be India's first bilateral military exercise with any country involving all three services.
- Main objective: to carry out joint exercises for suppression of international terrorist activities under the United Nations mandate.

2. India collaborating with Russia for nuclear power plant in Bangladesh

In News:

- India is collaborating with Russia to build the Ropur nuclear power plant in Bangladesh

In news:

- Key Fact:** It is the first initiative under a Indo-Russia deal to undertake atomic energy projects in third countries.
- This will also be India's first atomic energy venture abroad.

Significance:

- Indian nuclear establishment for years has not been able to grow, internationally, due to sanctions imposed on New Delhi post the 1974 Pokhran tests.
- The Ropur project, which is being built by the Russians near Dhaka, will be Bangladesh's first atomic energy project.
- After commissioning of two units, each with a capacity of 1200 MWs, Bangladesh will be the third South Asian country after India and Pakistan to harness energy from atomic fission.
- India signed a civil nuclear cooperation deal with Bangladesh under which the two sides can supply and manufacture equipment, material for the atomic power plant.

- **Concerns:** It is not clear what kind of “collaboration” India was doing since it is not a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group

Basic Information:

Nuclear Suppliers Group:

- The NSG is a multi-national body which aims at reduction of proliferation of nuclear weapons.
- It is a 48-member body which was established to stop civilian nuclear trade from being used for military purpose.
- The NSG was set up in response to India's first nuclear test in May 1974.
- India hasn't signed the NPT or CTBT and hence there has been aversion from China to accept it in the NSG bloc.

INDIA-NORTH KOREA

1. India under U.S. pressure to scale down ties with North Korea.

In News:

- U.S. officials have asked India to cut down ties with Pyongyang (North Korea).
- The American insistence that India reduce ties with North Korea is an important move as it aims to draw New Delhi more strongly into the East Asian crisis

India- Japan joint statement:

- Described North Korea as a common threat.
- Called upon North Korea to roll back its nuclear and missile programmes.
- India and Japan called on the international community to rigorously and fully implement relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions to maximise pressure on North Korea.
- Also discussed the role of Pakistan's A.Q. Khan network in supporting the clandestine nuclear programme of North Korea.

India and North Korea:

- India has repeatedly deplored the recent missile and nuclear tests by Pyongyang though bilateral ties with the government of Kim Jong-un have remained more or less undisturbed.
- India played a key role in the resolution of the Korean War during the early 1950s and has maintained diplomatic ties with Pyongyang.
- India supported the U.N. in banning trade with North Korea though the Ministry of External Affairs has maintained that Indian trade has consisted of humanitarian ingredients like food items and medicines.

INDIA-SOUTH KOREA

1. Tweaks to pact with South Korea mooted.

In News:

- India is looking to plug loopholes in its Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with South Korea following concerns over a recent sudden surge in imports of gold and related articles from that country.
- Authorities are also learnt to be probing a possible “criminal angle” behind the recent rapid rise in imports of the yellow metal from South Korea.
- Certain firms, “owned and operated by some Indians”, allegedly misusing the India-South Korea FTA — officially called the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) — that allows duty-free imports of the precious metal and its articles.
- The authorities are examining a possible criminal angle in such transactions as those entities were allegedly sending gold medallion directly from Dubai to South Korea and then exporting to India, in violation of the FTA norms.
- Currently, under the FTA, duty-free import of gold medallion is allowed only if it has met the norm of ‘Change in Tariff Heading’ under the Harmonised System (HS) Code — which means one could send gold bars and rods from a third country to South Korea, convert them into medallion (thereby changing the tariff line due to some transformation) there, then export to India and avail the zero-duty benefit.

Key Fact:

- Gold imports from South Korea had shot up to around \$340 million during July 1-August 3, 2017, while the same for the entire 2016-17 was just about \$71 million.
- India in the bilateral meeting to be held soon with South Korea on trade issues, will come up with a long-lasting measure, push for inclusion of tighter norms in the FTA on imports of gold and its items, to prevent misuse.
- India will insist on incorporating a clause in the FTA specifying the criteria of (at least 35%) ‘value addition’ as well as ‘Change in Tariff Sub-Heading’ (under the Harmonised System Code) to ensure that the item has undergone substantial transformation in South Korea, and not just routed through that country to take advantage of the duty-free norms under the FTA.
- Simultaneously, there are also plans to impose safeguard duty (of around 12.5%) on gold imports from South Korea.

INDIA-MYANMAR

1. Suu Kyi promises to resettle 'verified' Rohingya refugees

Context:

- Rohingya's crisis.
- UN Secretary-General demanded an end to the military campaign and a better deal for the Muslim minority.

In News:

- Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi pledged to hold rights violators to account over the Rohingya crisis but refused to blame the country's army.
- Ms. Suu Kyi called for patience and understanding of the crisis which has driven some 4,21,000 Rohingya out of Myanmar.
- Ms. Suu Kyi vowed to resettle some refugees but offered no solutions to halt what the UN calls army-led "ethnic cleansing" in Rakhine state, where soldiers are accused of burning Rohingya out of their homes.

2. Army hits ultras on Myanmar border

In News:

- The Army has inflicted heavy casualties on NSCN(K) militants in an operation close to the Myanmar border.
- NSCN(K): the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K), a key rebel group that had pulled out of the 14-year-old ceasefire in March 2015 and has been on the warpath with security agencies ever since.
- The operation was limited to the Indian border.
- June 2015 operation: Indian troops crossed over to Myanmar to carry out a surgical strike against NSCN(K) militants

INDIA-SYRIA

1. India assures support to Syria in the fight against terrorism

Context:

- Grand mufti of Syrian Republic Ahmad Badr Eddine Mohammad Abid Hassoun visit to India.

In News:

- India assures support to Syria in the fight against terrorism, a major theatre of dreaded terror group ISIS.
- The Home Minister, Rajnath Singh welcomed the grand mufti and discussion was held on wide-ranging issues including terrorism and security

WORLD AFFAIRS

1. Asia Africa Growth Corridor aims for people-centric growth strategy

Context:

- Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC).
- Emergence of Idea: during the joint declaration issued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in November 2016.

Asia Africa Growth Corridor:

- The AAGC envisages a people-centric sustainable growth strategy.
- The AAGC is an economic cooperation agreement between the governments of India and Japan.
- It engages various stakeholders- governments, firms, think tanks and civil society.
- It would be raised on the four pillars of.
- Development and cooperation projects,
- Quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity,
- Enhancing capacities and skills, and
- People-to-people partnership.
- The strengths of AAGC will be aligned with the development priorities of different countries and sub-regions of Asia and Africa.
- AAGC-led growth in Africa and Asia will be responsive to the collective commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Trade Facilitation:

- In a study conducted by the European Commission, it is found that the time taken for export and import activities is among the highest in Africa (excluding the northern region).
- Moreover, the documents required to export and import are also on the higher side in Africa.
- According to OECD trade facilitation indicators, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are below the best practices.
- However, achieving the desired level of trade facilitation is a challenging task for Africa and Asia because of lack of technical know-how and skills.

India's role:

- India has already made efforts through various initiatives to develop capabilities in other countries in Asia and Africa in the past.
- Although many of them are not fully developed due to paucity of resources.
- But we can re-energize such projects/initiatives through AAGC funding that could lead to promotion of imports and exports.
- India must evolve appropriate strategy to meet import and export requirements of partner countries in the medium term.

Reasons for low level growth in Africa:

- The low level of private investment in Africa is withholding high growth.
- Owing to risky projects on long gestation projects, there has been lukewarm response from investors
- Possible Solution: Private investors may be attracted by using limited state funding using the European Investment Fund (EIF) Model.
- The EIF consists of subsidizing investment, loss protection, capital relief, reduced interest rate, low collateral requirements, lease and guarantee.

Way forward:

- Working closely with the international community, the Asia Africa Growth Corridor will be instrumental in realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific region.
- As a unique process, AAGC takes a multi-stakeholder as well as participatory approach towards development.

2. N. Korea tests 'hydrogen' bomb, sparks outrage**In News:**

- North Korea: tested a 'hydrogen' bomb. This bomb can be mounted on a missile, declaring its biggest-ever nuclear detonation a "perfect success."
- U.S. President Donald Trump response: termed it as a very dangerous act.
- China an ally of N. Korea, response: expressed sharp disapproval and began emergency monitoring for radiation at its border with the North.
- Japan's response: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe described it as "absolutely unacceptable"
- Russia's Foreign Ministry expressed the "strongest condemnation".
- S.Korea: President Moon Jae-in called for new United Nations sanctions to "completely isolate North Korea", and said the South would discuss deploying "the strongest strategic assets of the U.S. military."

Basic Information:

- Difference between a Hydrogen bomb and Atom bomb:
- The hydrogen bomb, also called a thermonuclear bomb, uses fusion - or atomic nuclei coming together - to produce explosive energy. Stars also produce energy through fusion.
- Atomic bombs rely on fission, or atom-splitting, just as nuclear power plants do.
- The technology of the hydrogen bomb is more sophisticated, and once attained, it is a greater threat. It can also be made small enough to fit on a head of an ICBM.

3. No shift in policy on Pakistan: China**In News:**

- 9th BRICS summit: China agreed to list Pakistan-based outfits Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) as international terror groups.
- China has now reassured Pakistan that there was no shift in its policy of recognising Islamabad's role in countering global extremism.

In News:

- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed that Beijing saw Islamabad as a close ally that is a key part of the battle against international terrorism.

Post-BRICS balancing act

- Chinese foreign minister praised Pakistan as Beijing's "good brother and iron friend".

4. Sushma slams Pakistan over terror funding**In News:****BRICS Ministerial Meeting**

- Held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly
- External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said militants continue to find shelter in countries using terrorism as an "instrument of state policy". Terror groups draw sustenance from support systems in South Asia
- The Minister called on her counterparts from BRICS to condemn efforts to sponsor the menace.
- Ms. Swaraj also called for terrorists' funding, their weapons supply, training and political support to be systematically cut off.
- Ms. Swaraj also called for early conclusion of the CCIT while urging all the BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — to condemn efforts, including by states, to use religion to justify, sustain and sponsor terrorism against other countries.

Projects in Afghanistan

- India has announced to take up 116 "high impact community developmental projects" in 31 provinces of Afghanistan
- The decision was taken during a meeting between Ms. Swaraj and Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani
- Over and above these high impact projects, India has also offered assistance for six new projects under granting aid assistance from India. One of them is low-cost housing for returning Afghan refugees, road connectivity, national Park and economic development

Basic Information:

- Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism
- The CCIT provides a legal framework which makes it binding on all signatories to deny funds and safe havens to terrorist groups. The original draft that was tabled in 1996 and discussed until April 2013, as, included following major objectives:

- To have a universal definition of terrorism that all 193-members of the UNGA will adopt into their own criminal law
- To ban all terror groups and shut down terror camps
- To prosecute all terrorists under special laws
- To make cross-border terrorism an extraditable offence worldwide.

5. **India calls for a representative UN**

Context: U.N reforms

In News:

- India has extended support to efforts of U.S. President Donald Trump to reform the UN, saying it should include the expansion of the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the world body to keep pace with the changed times
- During a discussion on UN reform, Mr. Trump insisted that he had always seen the “great potential” of the organisation, but warned that “bureaucracy” was stopping it from realising its potential.
- India’s stance: world body should be reformed to keep pace with the changed times, including the expansion of its permanent or non-permanent members

6. **Centre rethinks joining Hague child custody pact**

In News:

- “Hague Convention”:
- Deals with international child custody cases.
- Passed in 1980, the Hague Convention on International Child Abduction, which came into force in 1983, rules that in any child custody case, the court of the country where the child is a “habitual resident” will adjudicate who will get custody. A total of ninety four countries, mostly developed nations in the Americas, Europe and Australia, are signatories to the Hague Convention

India-U.S. Consular dialogue:

- Between officials from the Ministries of External Affairs, Women and Child Development and Home and their counterparts in Washington.
- The U.S. might push India to join the “Hague Convention” in this dialogue session.
- **Legal provisions:** The Hague Convention is circumventing the Indian system, and India can’t abdicate its responsibility to Indian parents, mostly mothers, and their young children.
- **Separated parents:** American officials say the problem arises when one parent is in the U.S., while the other brings the child to India (their home country) to avoid an adverse decision in the U.S. court.
- **‘Women worst hit’:** the worst affected in the cases covered by the convention are women, who form 68% of the parents that take or “abduct” their children to their home countries, and must be protected.

7. **Bound by Paris climate deal, says India**

In News:

- U.N. ‘Leadership Summit on Environment Pact’
- India reaffirmed its commitment to the landmark Paris climate change agreement, saying it is willing to “work above and beyond” the pact to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- India was at the forefront of the debate on environment and development.

Background Information:

- The United States’ President Donald Trump, in June, 2017 announced that his country was withdrawing from the Paris deal, arguing that it gives undue advantage to countries like India and China.
- **Paris Pact:** India, which is the world’s third-largest carbon polluter, along with more than 190 nations, reached a pact in December 2015 with an aim to prevent an increase in the global average temperature and keep it well below 2 degrees Celsius. The deal, which replaced the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, was ratified in October 2016.

8. **50 nations ink UN nuclear ban treaty opposed by big powers**

In News:

- Fifty countries signed a treaty to ban nuclear weapons, a pact that the world’s nuclear powers spurned but supporters hailed as a historic agreement nonetheless.
- Brazil was the first country to sign onto the ban, followed by nations from Algeria to Venezuela.
- It needs 50 ratifications to take effect among the nations that back it.
- This treaty is an important step towards the universally held goal of a world free of nuclear weapons
- The U.S., Britain and France said the prohibition wouldn’t work and would end up disarming their nations while emboldening “bad actors”
- Supporters of the pact say it’s time to push harder toward eliminating atomic weapons than nations have done through the nearly 50-year-old Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Modus operandi:

- The members would be barred from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, otherwise acquiring, possessing or stockpiling nuclear weapons “under any circumstances.”

Basic Information:

- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

The objectives of the NPT are as follows:

- Prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology
- Promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy

- Nuclear disarmament.
- The three objectives viz. non-proliferation, disarmament, and the right to peacefully use nuclear technology, are sometimes called three pillars of NPT.

Parties

- The treaty entered into force in 1970 and in 1995 it was extended indefinitely. It has 190 parties.
- All the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are among its members.
- India, Pakistan & Israel have not signed the treaty. North Korea acceded to the NPT in 1985, then withdrew in 2003

9. BRICS summit: BRICS declares Lashkar, Jaish as global terror groups

Context:

- Ninth annual BRICS summit.
- Venue: Xiamen, China.

In News:

- Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) declared as terror organization: The Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) grouping unequivocally named Pakistan-based groups — Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) — as terror organizations.
- Minutes of the joint communiqué released at the BRICS summit:
- Expressed concern about the regional security situation.
- Listed the Taliban, IS/Daesh, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, including the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, TTP and Hizb-ut-Tahrir as sources of violence.
- Expressed strong condemnation of “all terrorist attacks worldwide,”

Declaration and its impact on India-China ties:

- Beijing's earlier position: repeatedly asked for a “technical hold” in designating the head of the Pakistan-based JeM as an international terrorist in the United Nations Security Council 1267 committee.
- 9th BRICS summit declaration: underscores a shift in China's position, in mending its ties with India.

Meet on radicalization:

- India is now planning to hold a global conference on countering radicalization.
- India in the context of the Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) and the BRICS offered to organise a global conference on countering radicalisation.

10. PM's '10 Noble Commitments' for BRICS members to achieve global transformation

In News:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested 10 commitments to be made by the five-member bloc for their role in global transformation. These are as follows:
- **Creating a Safer World** - By organised and coordinated action on three issues: Counter-terrorism, Cyber-security and Disaster Management.
- **Creating a Greener World** - By taking concerted action on countering climate change through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance.
- **Creating an Enabled World** - By sharing and deploying suitable technologies to enhance efficiency, economy and effectiveness.
- **Creating an Inclusive World** - By economic mainstreaming of our people including in the banking and financial system.
- **Creating a Digital World** - By bridging the digital divide within and outside our economies.
- **Creating a Skilled World** - By giving future-ready skills to millions of our youth.
- **Creating a Healthier World** - By cooperating in research and development to eradicate diseases, and enabling affordable healthcare for all.
- **Creating an Equitable World** - By providing equity of opportunity to all, particularly through gender equality.
- **Creating a Connected World** - By enabling free flow of goods, people and services.
- **Creating a Harmonious World** - by promoting ideologies, practices and heritage that are centred on peaceful coexistence and living in harmony with nature.

11. Back on track: on India and China's united front at BRICS

Context:

- India and China putting up a united front at the BRICS summit, and proposed a revival of the Panchsheel principles of peaceful cooperation

BRICS Summit- Key points

- India-China, agreement that Doklam-like situations must not recur is an indication that India and China are looking for new mechanisms to strengthen the border defence agreements that have held in the past.
- China gave nod to the inclusion of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed among the terrorist groups threatening regional stability.
- China choosing not to speak of the contentious Belt and Road Initiative at the summit suggested it was heeding India's concerns.

- Both countries expressed similar views about resisting economic protectionism of the kind that the Trump administration in the U.S. has been espousing.
- All five countries condemned North Korean nuclear tests, while advocating dialogue and not the use of force.

Way forward

- Indian and Chinese officials must re-engage in a sustained manner to address all areas of discord which led to the charged situation at Doklam.
- They must review where the border defence standard operating procedures failed.
- Two countries must convene the delayed meeting of the Special Representatives, and add the latest claims and counter-claims over the Sikkim boundary and the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction to the agenda for discussions.
- It is necessary to see that the much-acclaimed BRICS language on terrorist groups like the LeT and JeM is translated into actionable points.
- Beijing will have an early opportunity to do so in October when the issue of designating JeM chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist comes up at the UN Security Council and when the UN's Financial Action Task Force takes stock of Pakistan's actions against the LeT.

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Liberalization's impact on gender discrimination

Context:

- 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.
- India's gender balance in entrepreneurship and jobs remains among the lowest in the world.
- Globalization and trade policy have made a limited contribution towards India's convergence in gender segmentation.

Liberalization and gender Discrimination:

- Increased market competition, forces firms to eliminate inefficient discriminatory practices, including gender discrimination
- Market competition works in favour of women, as women are more competitive, and offer cheaper and more flexible labour vis-à-vis men.

Present trends:

- The share of females in manufacturing employment has barely increased over the last two decades. Female activity is largely concentrated in the unorganized sector.
- Women entrepreneurs are more dominant in industries that pay lower average wages.
- Despite many competitive reforms that India has undertaken, this pattern of gender-based segmentation has been accentuated over the years.

Manufacturing Sector

- The female ownership shares are highest and typically exceed 50% in industries related to chemicals and chemical products, tobacco products, and paper and paper products.
- At the opposite end, female ownership shares are 2% or less in industries related to computers, motor vehicles, fabricated metal products, and machinery and equipment.

Service sector

- Among service industries, female ownership shares exceed 30% in industries related to sanitation and education. Industries related to research and development, water transport, and land transport have the lowest female ownership rates, at 1% or less.
- The female ownership rates in major cities tend to be higher than overall state averages.

- The states with the highest female service sector ownership rates are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, with average female ownership shares exceeding 12%.
- The lowest female ownership rates are in Rajasthan, Bihar, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh, each with 6% or less. It is surprising that the nation's capital, Delhi, has the lowest share of female-owned establishments in manufacturing. Its position in the services sector is only slightly above the national average.

Factors Affecting Female Entry into various Industries

- Empirical results suggest that a district/industry with more incumbent female employment has a greater female entry share. Among district-level traits, a higher female-to-male ratio, an age profile emphasizing working age population, and better quality infrastructure appear important.
- Inadequate infrastructure also affects women more than men, because women are often responsible for a larger share of, and often more time-consuming, household activities.
- In particular, transport infrastructure and paved roads within villages play an important role. Travel in India can be restrictive and unpredictable, and women face greater constraints in geographic mobility imposed by safety concerns and social norms.
- Better electricity and water access may reduce the burden of women in providing essential household inputs for their families, and allow for more time to be directed toward entrepreneurial activities.

Way forwards:

- India's 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, passed in 1992, instituted one-third seat reservations for women in local governance bodies. The political empowerment of women had huge beneficial effects. The political reservation for women has gained India global recognition.
- India's economic liberalization and increased market competition has not eliminated gender segmentation. However, improved physical and human infrastructure, and domestic pro-competitive reforms have reduced gender segmentation.
- Gender will play a bigger and more strategic role in India's future growth.
- This growth will come in many forms: increased female labour force participation, improvements in productivity, elimination of gender discrimination in access to bank loans, and increased voice and political representation.
- Simply put, empowering half of the potential workforce has significant economic benefits beyond promoting gender equality.

2. Women employment rate in India sees dramatic drop in last 20 years

In News:

- A team of economists from the World Bank released a report on the labour force participation of women in India.
- Using data from the NSSO, this report shows that labour force participation rate of women in India has slipped dramatically in the last 20 years.

Key highlights of the report:

- The drop has been most dramatic among women in rural India.
- Research shows that while nearly half the rural women aged 15 years and above were “in the labour force” in 1993-94, the number dropped to less than 36% in 2011-12.
- Labour force participation rate of urban women has also dropped in the same period.

3. A fight against prejudice

Context:

- Britain to incorporate measures against caste discrimination in equality law.

Key points:

- British government completed a conference on whether measures against caste discrimination should be included in equality law.
- This was done to ensure there is “appropriate and proportionate legal protection” against unlawful discrimination because of a person’s origins.

World Conference on Untouchability

- The first World Conference on Untouchability (June 2009) took place in London.
- This conference explored versions of untouchability bringing together experts and activists from across the globe.
- Conference concluded with the “Conway Hall Declaration on Untouchability”, which urged all states where such practices were prevalent to introduce legislation to outlaw the practice and undertake programs of education.

Facts:

- Moreover a comprehensive study in 2010 by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research identified evidence of caste discrimination in the workplace, in the provision of services and in education.
- “Hindu organisations’ answer to an international conscription of Dalits rights activism has brought the Indian Hindu nationalist agenda into U.K. politics.

4. NHRC notice to TN, AP over Devadasi-like system

In News:

- The NHRC has issued notices to the governments and police chiefs of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh over the alleged inhuman treatment being meted out to girls and women who are forcibly taken to temples as part of an old ritual that resembles the banned Devadasi system.
- The girls and women are taken to temples of Goddess Mathamma for “offering” in Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu and adjoining places.

Practice:

- As a part of the ritual, the girls are dressed up as a bride and once the ceremony is over, their dresses are removed by five boys, virtually leaving them naked.
- They are denied to live with their families and have education.
- They are forced to live in Mathamma temple deemed to be like a public property and face sexual exploitation
- This practice is allegedly “another form of Devadasi system”, which is still practiced in some parts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh
- **NHRC observations:** The rights panel has observed that if the allegations are true, these amount to violation of human rights, including the right to education, rights to life and dignity besides the childrens rights.

Key Fact:

- Devadasi system is a banned religious practice in some parts of India whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple.
- The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty.
- The Union Home Ministry in December 2015 had asked all states to take strong action against those involved in the heinous practice which is against the dignity of women.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AND ECOLOGY

1. Volcanic carbon dioxide drove ancient global warming: study

In News:

Study revelations:

- Extreme global warming event 56 million years ago was driven by massive carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from volcanoes, during the formation of the North Atlantic Ocean.
- Palaeocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM) was associated with a geologically rapid doubling of atmospheric CO₂ in less than 25 thousand years — with volcanoes squarely to blame.

Palaeocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM) event:

- Is the most rapid and extreme natural global warming event of the last 66 million years. It lasted for around 150 thousand years and global temperatures increased by at least five degrees Celsius. PETM roughly coincided with the formation of massive 'flood basalts' — large stretches of ocean floor coated in lava, resulting from a series of huge eruptions.
- **Believed till now:** PETM event was caused by the injection of carbon into the ocean and atmosphere; the ultimate trigger, the source of this carbon, and the total amount released, have up to now all remained elusive.

Land drifts:

- Greenland first started separating from north-western Europe, thereby creating the North Atlantic Ocean.
- There was a total input of more than 10,000 petagrammes of carbon from a predominantly volcanic source.
- This is a vast amount of carbon — some 30 times larger than all the fossil fuels burned to date and equivalent to all current conventional and unconventional fossil fuel reserves.

2. 'Give proof of incentivising farmers'

In News:

- **New research findings:** An increase of just 1-2 degrees Celsius in shallow waters on the West Antarctic Peninsula has radically reduced marine diversity.
- In an area like Australia, differences in ocean temperatures are likely to change around 10-20 degrees throughout the year; however, species in Antarctica have evolved in an environment where there is very little variation in temperature. It's certainly a concern, when the temperature changes just by one or two degree Celsius here in the Antarctic region.

3. Air pollution throws shade on India's solar success

In News:

- **Expert opinion:** Air pollution is diminishing India's capacity to harness power from the sun.
- New study by Scientists: U.S. and Indian scientists measured how man-made particles floating in the air and deposited as grime on solar panels combined to seriously impair sunlight from converting to energy.

Findings:

- Sand and dust that sickens millions across India every year is also sapping solar power generation by more than 25 percent.
- This interference causes steep drops in power generation.
- At present levels in India, it could amount to roughly 3,900 MW of lost energy — six times the capacity of its largest solar farm, a gigantic field of 2.5 million panels.

4. National grid to curb water deficit on Gadkari's agenda

In News:

- India is planning to have a water grid with the aim of ensuring no area of the country faces any water deficit.
- The concept of water grid in India mainly centres around the existing inter-linking of rivers (ILR) plan which was conceived in order to transfer water from surplus zones to deficit zones via inter-connected rivers.
- **Present focus:** linking three ILR projects - Ken-Betwa link (Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh), Par-Tapi-Narmada and Damanganga-Pinjal links (Gujarat and Maharashtra).

5. In fact: Hard to ban, harder to dispose

Context:

- National Green Tribunal called for a complete ban on "plastic carry bags" smaller than 50 microns in Delhi's markets.
- Maximum usage of plastic bags was to carry vegetables, fruit, meat and fish because they were convenient, easily available and cost-effective.

Problems associated with plastic bags:

- Serious environmental degradation
- Harm to public health, animals in the city
- Ability to choke up drains and sewer lines, causing floods during the rainy season.
- Plastic was inherently not a public health hazard, but the inability to collect plastic waste leads to health hazards

Government Initiative to clean up the menace:

- In 2016, the government notified Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, which regulate manufacture, sale, distribution and use of plastic carry bags

Disposal Problem

- Within a fortnight after the NGT ban, authorities in Delhi had seized 9,000 kg of plastic carry bags but have since struggled to find effective ways to dispose of it.

Effective Disposal:

- Himachal Pradesh, the first state in the country to impose a ban on the use of plastic bags in 2003, effectively managed the seized plastic bags.
- The state sought the help of rag pickers to collect the plastic bags and mixed it with other materials and then used it for road construction.
- The plastic waste of Shimla and Chandigarh were reportedly processed together and the refuse drive fuel (RDF) is sent to power plants in Patiala and Nakodar in Punjab.
- The confiscated bags should be returned to the manufacturers or mixed with other materials and recycled.
- Delhi has waste-to-energy plants, it could also be sent there.

Way forwards:

- With last month's order, the NGT was reiterating an earlier ban on use of disposable plastic in Delhi from January 1, 2017.
- Ban driven as a government programme will head nowhere. It must be made as a 'people's movement'.
- Best example: In 2016, Kannur district in Kerala launched a campaign with the slogan 'Nalla Nadu, Nalla Mannu' — good village, good soil — which culminated in a complete ban on plastic carry bags five months later
- Just imposing a ban is not enough. We have to first give users alternatives to plastic bags, then impose the ban and only after that penalise violators with fines.
- There has to be at least six months of aggressive campaigning before such a ban is imposed.
- This has also been the strategy in countries like Kenya and Rwanda.
- Banning plastic should be targeted towards behaviour change.

6. In Nicaragua, a fight to save endangered tapirs**In News:**

- **Tapir:** The largest land mammals in Central America, the brown, pig-like animals with sloping snouts.
- International Union for Conservation of Nature classification: considered at risk of extinction and is the "most threatened" quadruped in Nicaragua.

- **Threats:** Human encroachment and climate change have decimated the woodland habitat of the Baird's tapir, one of five species left in the world, and, along with human and feline predators, have helped wipe out 16 other tapir species.

7. Pollution watchdog issues guidelines to manage odour at urban solid waste landfills**Context:**

- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) issues detailed guidelines for proper monitoring and management of odour at urban municipal solid waste landfills

Solid waste management

- As per official estimates, at present around 62 million tonnes of solid waste is generated every year and it is expected to reach 165 million tonnes in 2030.
- Of the 62 million, only 43 million tonnes is collected and only 12 millions tonnes is treated
- The Solid waste Management Rules 2016, identified odour as a public nuisance.
- "Odour regulation" is still in nascent stage in India. Odorous compounds may have a direct effect on human health. It generally leads to vomiting, headaches, nausea etc

Guidelines:

- It suggested a green belt around landfill sites and advocated for selection of "appropriate plant species for vegetation cover" to assist in reducing odours.
- MSW Landfill system be designed for tapping LFG (landfill gases) efficiently to mitigate fugitive odorous emissions
- The guidelines also batted for initiating legislative norms for creating baseline data on odour
- Need for gradual shift for installation of Continuous Odour Measurement Systems (sensor based) for getting real-time data.
- It also outlined challenges to odour monitoring like lack of source-based database on odour levels, low awareness on odour (public nuisance) and lack of legislative obligations
- It stated that the selection and number of landfill sites for a city should be based on factors like requirement of land for the disposal site by considering the present population and projected growth over the next 20 years at least.
- Other factors include whether the selected site is free from the influence of other odorous sources and the topography of the site (slope, proximity to water sources like river and natural springs).
- Selection of landfill site should be integrated with the urban development planning so that even expansions of city in next two or three decades are not encompassing the selected MSW site
- Guidelines have been prepared keeping in view the various mandatory and statutory provisions and the climatic conditions that accelerate biodegradation of organic wastes

8. A fragile ark that shelters 2,626 creatures

In News:

- Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has come out with a compendium of animal species in the Indian Sundarbans, estimating that there are 2,626 of them in the fragile island ecosystem.
- **First edition:** "Fauna of Sundarban Biosphere Reserve" is the first consolidated and updated information of the faunal diversity of the Sundarbans. It lists over 2,600 species, including the new species described from the mangrove ecosystem as well as threats faced by them due to climate change
- The listing includes a diverse 25 phyla, as they are biologically classified.
- The Indian segment of the Sundarbans, part of a UNESCO World Heritage site, forms part of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta across 9,630 sq. km, distributed among 104 islands.
- Due to pressure on habitat from people and natural threats that have shrunk the mangrove swamp habitat, mammal numbers are declining.

Key Species:

- The fortunes of 50 mammalian species including the Asian small-clawed Otter, Gangetic Dolphin, Grey and Marsh Mongoose and the wild Rhesus Monkey, the only primate here, are also documented.
- Rhinos, Swamp deer, Barking deer and Hog deer and Asiatic Wild Water Buffalo are not found in Sundarbans anymore.
- There are 356 species of birds, the most spectacular being raptors, or birds of prey, that occupy the highest canopies of the forest. Osprey, Brahminy Kite and White-Bellied Sea Eagle are dominant, while Rose-ringed parakeets, flycatchers and warblers are also found in the middle tier, while in the lower tier, kingfishers abound — and the Sundarbans has nine of them.
- There are 11 turtles, including the famous Olive Ridley and Hawksbill sea turtles and the most threatened freshwater species, the River Terrapin.
- A crocodile, 13 lizards including three species of Monitor Lizards and five Geckos are found here. The rivers, creeks channels and the islands together harbour about 30 snake species, led by the King Cobra, considered vulnerable by IUCN.
- Others documented are the Monocellate or monocled cobra, Russell's viper, common and banded kraits. Besides, ten species of frogs and toads are found.
- **Cartilaginous fish:** The mangrove ecosystem covers about 350 species of fish. Cartilaginous fish, which have skeletons of cartilage rather than bone, make up 10.3%. The IUCN conservation status shows 6.3% fish are near-threatened and 4.85% are threatened. Also, there are 173 molluscs.
- In another indication of its richness, 753 insect

species are encountered in the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve. Of these, 210 are butterflies and moths. Moreover, Crustaceans — crabs, shrimp and prawns — constitute 334 species

9. Giant sea snail plan to rescue Barrier Reef

Context:

- Great Barrier Reef: Saving the corals.

In News:

- A giant starfish-eating snail (Pacific triton sea snail — also known as the giant triton) could be unleashed to help save the Great Barrier Reef.
- Predatory crown-of-thorns starfish, which munch coral, are naturally-occurring but have proliferated due to pollution and run-off at the struggling World Heritage-listed ecosystem
- A major study of the 2,300-km long reef's health in 2012 shows coral cover halved over the past 27 years, with 42% of the damage attributed to the crown-of-thorns starfish.
- The snails, which can grow to half a metre, have a well developed sense of smell and can hunt their prey by scent alone.

10. A 'Boat Lab' to study Brahmaputra

In News:

Brahmaputra Biodiversity Biology Boat (B4):

- The Department of Biotechnology is planning to commission a two-tiered barge that will roughly be the size of two large conference rooms and host scientists and a full-fledged lab.
- Barge to allow those on board to collect samples from various stretches of the river, perform tests on water quality and biodiversity of the wider ecosystem.
- The proposed vessel would also be linked to smaller boats and research labs.
- The "B4" will also have a teaching laboratory for school and college children.

11. A case for continued support for green energy

Context:

- Going by recent reports, it appears that the Union government is contemplating withdrawing all kind of incentives that are being provided to renewable-based electricity by 2022.
- It is said that there will not be any targeting of renewable energy after 2020 (presumably no renewable purchase obligations, or RPOs, after 2022).
- Moreover, the draft National Energy Policy 2017 proposes gradual withdrawal of the provision of "must run" status and other support such as non-levy of interstate transmission charges.
- The sharp reduction in bids for solar and wind power forms the basis of the argument that now these technologies are ready to face markets.

Solar Energy:

- While the record low prices of solar power in the recent past have been on account of very low global prices of solar photovoltaic modules and accessories.
- Payment Security Mechanism with guaranteed uptake of electricity- Example-Rewa solar park. This in turn helped bring down the cost of capital that constitutes about 70% of renewable electricity prices.
- The Solar Energy Corp. of India wind power auction contained three very crucial elements-
- Power purchase agreement with PTC (India) Ltd and not the distribution utility, thereby providing security of payment against the sale of electricity as well as assured offtake of electricity.
- Waiver of inter-state transmission charges

Compensation for system losses

- Therefore, these low prices are the result of several facilitating measures.
- So, doing away with such provisions appears to be totally counter-productive to India's ambitions in this field.
- The recent outcomes of the solar and wind auctions may have made officials to take for granted that the things will continue to move in a certain way but at the same time ignoring the key parameters that helped chart out that direction in the first place.
- Undoubtedly, a good policy framework has to have sunset clauses for incentives but withdrawals must also be nuanced and gradual, arrived at after taking into account their long-term implications on the sector.

Economic survey Volume-2 and Renewable Energy:

- The survey talks about the "social cost" of renewable energy in comparison to that of coal-based power generation.
- Besides other cost parameters, including health and environmental costs, the survey includes "the opportunity cost of stranded conventional power assets" as one of the components of the social cost.
- The losses incurred by investors and lenders due to the underutilization of coal power plants becomes the most significant contributor to renewable energy's social cost, making it three times more expensive than conventional power.

Counter View points

- According to Central Electricity Authority, the share of renewable electricity in India's total electricity generation was around 7.6% between April 2016 and March 2017. So how can this be the reason for below-par plant load factors of coal power plants?
- By the same logic, no disruptive transition to better and more efficient technologies would ever be possible because during the transition stage, the older

assets are bound to be underutilized or in a sense, financially stranded. Examples- UJALA, or Unnat Jyoti by Affordable Lighting for All, scheme that aims to promote efficient use of energy. This whole UJALA campaign must also be rendering manufacturers of incandescent lamps in a state of financial stress, so is that being factored in while estimating the social cost of LED lamps? The same also goes for electrical vehicles that surely would result in the supply chain of conventional automobile components becoming stranded assets?

- And how transparently does this "social cost" dispensation take into account the cost of longer term impacts of different alternatives?
- How accurate are the cost-components and how close are the assumptions to Indian realities?
- Public health in any case is always heavily discounted in all such calculations.

Way Forward:

- A good policy regime tries to balance these seemingly divergent viewpoints and provides direction for long-term and sustainable solutions for larger public good. This is particularly critical when the decisions made today could have far-reaching implications for generations to come.
- Besides, basing such decisions on anecdotal premise rather than on sound analytical evidence could very well jeopardize the momentum that renewable energy sector in the country has gained.
- It appears as if there is a lack of cohesion within different arms of the government, leading to conflicting signals.
- This, however, needs to be managed quickly to avoid the serious implications such mixed signals could have on our commitment to achieve about 40% of installed power capacity from non-fossil fuels by 2030.

12. Western Ghats throw up a new snake**In News:**

- Scientists have described a new species of non-venomous endemic snake, Aquatic Rhabdops.
- Location: Northern Western Ghats.

Features:

- The three-foot-long
- Nocturnal snake hunts for prey underwater.

Key Fact:

- All Rhabdops snakes are endemic to India.
- The Olive Forest Snake Rhabdops olivaceus is found only in the Western Ghats while the bi-coloured Forest Snake Rhabdops bicolor lives in a few localities in the northeast.
- The Aquatic Rhabdops too is found only in the laterite plateaus of the northern Western Ghats in Goa, southern Maharashtra and northern Karnataka, in areas facing severe human pressures.

- Endemicity, the phenomenon of being present only in a specific geographical area.

13. Climate change is going to hit the Indian economy hard

Context:

- World Economic Outlook of the IMF, highlights the damaging macroeconomic impact of weather shocks, particularly for low-income countries.
- It notes that for the median emerging market economy, growth goes down by 0.9 percentage point because of a 1-degree Celsius increase from a temperature of 22 degrees Celsius
- Climate change is serious challenge for India where about 50% of the population directly or indirectly depends on agriculture for a livelihood

Consequences of climate change:

- Productivity will start declining strongly
- Countries located in areas with higher temperature will face a disproportionate impact of global warming.
- Loss of output and lower productivity also affects capital formation, which has a bearing on medium- to long-term growth prospects.

Present scenario:

- Consensus was attained under the Paris Agreement to contain the rise in global temperature to below 2 degrees Celsius from the pre industrial levels
- But now Trump administration in the US is not keen on continuing with the Paris Agreement.
- It is being reported that advanced economies may not meet their commitment of reducing emissions
- The lack of will among industrialized economies to contain emissions, could lead to consequences that go beyond the realm of macroeconomics.

Necessary steps that needs to be taken:

- Emerging market and low-income economies have to build significant macroeconomic resilience.
- The IMF notes that right policies and institutions in place may help attenuate the effects of temperature shocks, to some extent.

Way forwards:

- Strengthen macroeconomic stability to be able to deal with such shocks.
- Work on programmes that will help improve the quality of land and reduce the risk of climate change.
- In Ethiopia, food and cash is provided to the poor who participate in local environmental programmes.
- This has resulted in reduction in soil loss and has increased the availability of water
- India can use employment under the MGNREGA in a better way to enhance soil and water conservation.
- Strengthen its overall capability by investing in and

adopting technology as the impact of climate change is not limited to agriculture

- For instance, better use of technology can reduce energy consumption for air conditioning. A district cooling system is being constructed in Gujarat International Finance Tec-City.
- It can be adopted in other cities as well.

14. Govt's wildlife action plan to focus on e-surveillance

Context:

- New National Wildlife Action Plan (2017-31).
- The action plan will be launched by environment minister Harsh Vardhan on the inaugural day of the Global Wildlife Programme (GWP) conference.

In News:

- The Centre will announce its new National Wildlife Action Plan (2017-31) on October 2 to strengthen conservation measures.
- Use of technology, including e-surveillance through drones, and modalities to involve people living around national parks and sanctuaries in conservation efforts will be key to this 14-year roadmap.
- The action plan spells out how India will go about handling these issues in a time-bound manner in the next 14 years.
- It covers all the issues concerning conservation, ranging from rehabilitation of threatened species to integrating climate change in wildlife planning.
- The plan has a road map to deal with poaching and illegal trade of animals and animal parts, and management of tourism in wildlife areas.
- Setting up special courts for effective implementation of the Wildlife Protection Act to ensure the speedy trial of wildlife crimes, identification and validation of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) available in various parts of the country for dealing with human-wildlife conflicts, and use of mobile technology to develop 'Digital Field Guides' for easy identification of various wildlife goods and their derivatives are other key features of the plan.
- The plan cites as a model the Gujarat forest department's initiative to appoint local youth as 'Vanya Praani Mitra' (friends of wild animals) in high conflict zones.
- The four-day conference will give India an opportunity to get acquainted with best practices on the management of wildlife habitats and minimising human-wildlife conflict situations.

Global Wildlife Programme (GWP):

- The GWP, initiated in 2015, is a World-Bank led partnership of 19 countries to promote the conservation and sustainable development by combating trafficking in wildlife.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. 39 successes later, PSLV launch fails

In News:

- Failed attempt: the PSLV-C39 mission carrying the replacement navigation satellite IRNSS-1H failed.
- This was the PSLV's first failure, after 39 continuously successful launches and only the second such instance since 1993.
- Reason for the failure: spacecraft was stuck in the heat shield in the last and fourth stage; it did not release into space as planned.

Impact:

- Dent the image that the PSLV commands in the global small-to-medium launchers market. It has been the most-sought-after vehicle for small satellites of up to 600-700 kg.

2. Novel compounds destroy biofilm-forming bacteria

In News:

- Scientists at the Bengaluru-based Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), have developed two new molecules capable of destroying bio-film forming bacteria.
- The molecules performed better than conventional antibiotics in killing the bacteria during the dormant phase.
- When used in combination with existing antibiotics, the molecules reduced the microbial burden in the case of burns and surgical wounds.

What are Bio-films?

- Biofilms are communities of microorganisms that attach to each other and to surfaces and are able to act as barriers to antibiotics.

3. Poor sleep? You may be at ADHD risk

In News:

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):

Symptoms:

- Lack of regular circadian sleep
- Struggling to concentrate
- Having too much energy and being unable to control behavior.
- ADHD sufferers often show greater alertness in the evening, which is the opposite of what is found in the general population.
- Fact:** 75% of children and adults suffer from ADHD.

4. NASA captures images of strong solar flares

In News:

- Two high-intensity solar flares were emitted, the second of which was the most intense recorded since the start of this sun cycle in December 2008, NASA said.
- These radiation flares, which can disrupt communications satellites, GPS and power grids by reaching the upper earth atmosphere, were detected and captured by the US Space Agency's Solar Dynamics Observatory.
- The current cycle of the sun, which began in December 2008, saw the intensity of solar activity decline sharply, opening the way to the "solar minimum".

Solar Cycles:

- Solar cycles last on average eleven years.
- At the end of the active phase, these eruptions become increasingly rare but still can be powerful.
- Solar storms result from an accumulation of magnetic energy in some places.
- These jets of ionized matter are projected — at high speed into and beyond the crown of the sun — hundreds of thousands of kilometres outward.

5. India could embrace CO2 capture technology

Context:

- Ongoing international conference on Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS).
- Venue: Alabama, U.S.
- Organized by:** The International Energy Agency's Green House Gas Research and Development

India and CO2 capture:

- Coal secretary remarks at the conference: India will explore the possibility of introducing technologies for capturing carbon dioxide emitted while burning coal and other fossil fuels.

Uses of Co2 captured:

- CO2 has commercial and industrial uses, particularly for Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) in depleting oil fields.
- Carbon dioxide has the ability to change the properties of oil and make it easier to extract.

6. Scientists make fuel from oxygen in air

In News:

- Scientists have found a way to produce methanol — an important chemical often used as fuel in vehicles — using oxygen in the air.
- This new method is an advance that may lead to cleaner, greener industrial processes worldwide.
- **Current practice:** Methanol is currently produced by breaking down natural gas at high temperatures into hydrogen gas and carbon monoxide before reassembling them — expensive and energy-intensive processes known as ‘steam reforming’ and ‘methanol synthesis.’
- **Advantages:** At present global natural gas production is about 2.4 billion tonnes per annum and 4% of this is flared into the atmosphere — roughly 100 million tonnes. This new approach of using natural gas could use this “waste” gas saving, saving carbon dioxide emissions

7. NASA successfully launches OSIRIS-REx spacecraft

In News:

- NASA has launched OSIRIS-REx spacecraft to collect samples from an asteroid 101955 Bennu and return to Earth.
- OSIRIS-Rex stands for Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, and Security-Regolith Explorer.

Mission objective:

- OSIRIS-REx is the third mission in NASA's New Frontiers program, which previously sent the New Horizons spacecraft zooming by Pluto and the Juno spacecraft into orbit around Jupiter.

Function of OSIRIS-Rex:

- OSIRIS-REx will spend two years travelling towards Bennu, arriving at the asteroid in August 2018.
- The probe will orbit the asteroid for 3 years, conducting several scientific experiments, before returning to Earth, with the sample capsule expected to land in Utah, USA in September 2023.

Scientific Mission Goals:

- During its three year orbit of Bennu, OSIRIS-REx will be conducting a range of scientific experiments in order to better understand the asteroid.
- Asteroid will be mapped using instruments on the probe, in order to select a suitable site for samples to be collected from.
- The aim of the mission is to collect a sample of regolith- the loose, soil-like material which covers the surface of the asteroid.

Facts about Bennu:

- **Proximity to Earth:** In order for OSIRIS-REx to reach its destination in a reasonable timeframe, NASA needed to find an asteroid which had a similar orbit to Earth. Around 7000 asteroids are ‘Near-Earth Objects’ (NEOs), meaning they travel within around ~30million miles

of the Earth. Out of these, just under 200 have orbits similar to Earth, with Bennu being one of these.

- **Size:** Small asteroids, those less than 200m in diameter, typically spin much faster than larger asteroids, meaning the regolith material can be ejected into space. Bennu is around 500m in diameter, so rotates slowly enough to ensure that the regolith stays on its surface.
- **Composition:** Bennu is a primitive asteroid, meaning it hasn't significantly changed since the beginning of the Solar System (over 4 billion years ago). It is also very carbon-rich, meaning it may contain organic molecules, which could have been precursors to life on Earth.
- Additionally, Bennu is of interest as it is a Potentially Hazardous Asteroid (PHA). Every 6 years, Bennu's orbit brings it within 200,000 miles of the Earth, which means it has a high probability of impacting Earth in the late 22nd Century.

8. Road clear for Chandrayaan-2

Context:

- ISRO has signalled the country's readiness for Chandrayaan II mission, which will be India's second mission to the moon.

In News:

- Chandrayaan II is an advanced version of the previous Chandrayaan-1 mission. It consists of an orbiter, lander and rover configuration.
- It is planned to be launched as a composite stack into the earth parking orbit (EPO) of 170 X 18,500 km by GSLV-Mk II.
- The wheeled rover will move on the lunar surface and will pick up soil or rock samples for on-site chemical analysis. The data will be relayed to Earth through the Chandrayaan-2 orbiter.

9. IIT-Roorkee to deploy earthquake warning system across N India

In News:

- IIT Roorkee is planning to deploy early earthquake warning system, the first-of-its-kind system across all seismic-prone major cities of the north India.
- Predicting earthquakes is impossible, but it is possible to save people living in distant cities through a simple warning system, which will give them enough lead time to reach a safe open place in case of an impending earthquake.
- The early earthquake warning system works on the principle of propagation of various waves with different velocities starting together from the same point and reaching the target at different times.
- The Electromagnetic (EM) waves travel much faster and will reach the target much ahead of the damaging seismic waves giving what we call a lead time

About the project:

- This project in India is part of the overall research being conducted by the IIT Roorkee, in the field of earthquake engineering and is an extension of the pilot project undertaken in the Himalayan region.
- IIT Roorkee was the first institute to deploy 84 sensors in seismic gap region of the Garhwal Himalayas in Uttarakhand with the help of the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- These on-site sensors stream data in real-time to a computer server at the institute using network of the Uttarakhand government which is being processed for issuing warning for magnitude 6 and above earthquakes.

Central seismic gap:

- Recent data sets compiled over the last 2 centuries reveal that large magnitude earthquakes have occurred around various regions of the Himalayas, but one segment of the central Himalaya, known as the central seismic gap, has potential to generate a major earthquake and researchers tend to believe that such an earthquake is overdue.
- The seismic sources with such potential in proximity to cities like Delhi has made this region a perfect case for the use of early earthquake warning system as one of the key disaster mitigation strategies.

10. Ultra-thin craft to wrap space debris**In News:**

- **The Brane Craft :** an ultra-thin spacecraft that can remove space debris — which potentially threatens satellites or astronauts — by enveloping junk in the Earth's orbit and dragging it through the atmosphere, causing it to burn up.
- **Developers:** U.S.-based Aerospace Corporation, is flexible and measures less than half the thickness of a human hair.
- The spacecraft's microprocessor and digital electronics are fabricated in such a way that if one component gets damaged, the others will continue to work.

11. Bird malaria in the Himalayan foothills**In News:**

- Bird or avian malaria caused by parasites Plasmodium and Haemoproteus is one of the most common and widespread diseases in birds.
- Avian malaria leads to decrease in reproductive success, anaemia, changes in body condition and even mortality in extreme cases.
- Mosquitoes transmit Plasmodium, while biting midges (Culicoides sp.) are responsible for Haemoproteus transmission in birds.
- Human malaria follows a seasonal pattern in the Himalayan foothills with peak transmission from July to October, whereas the avian malaria parasites showed no peak and were found to stay in blood throughout the year.

12. India joins quantum computing race**In News:**

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is planning to fund a project to develop quantum computers.

What is a quantum computer?

- A quantum computer, still largely a theoretical entity, employs the principles of quantum mechanics to store information in 'qubits' instead of the typical 'bits' of 1 and 0.
- **Advantages:** Qubits work faster because of the way such circuits are designed, and their promise is that they can do intensive number-crunching tasks much more efficiently than the fastest comparable computers.
- **For Example:** to sort a billion numbers, a quantum computer would require 3.5 million fewer steps than a traditional machine, and would find the solution in only 31,623 steps.

Key Fact:

- Internationally, Canada's D-Wave Systems, is a pioneer in developing quantum computers and has sold machines to Lockheed Martin and Google.
- Existing systems use principles of quantum computing to solve very limited problems.

13. Tech boost for soil quality scheme**Context:**

- Government takes a move to bring in technological boost to analyze the soil quality of farms across the country.

Keypoints:

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST) to link the program with a research project at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay that uses sophisticated imaging techniques and can picture the nutrient balance of a patch of land without necessarily collecting soil sample.
- Hyper spectral imaging analyses extremely detailed images of an object frequently to the scale of nanometers and then reconstructing its constituent elements.
- To gauge the health of the soil this technology utilizes the custom-developed algorithms, satellite-images, or those taken from low flying planes or drones, to calculate the proportion of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous the three most vital nutrients as well as other minerals in the soil.

INTERNAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE

1. Scorpene submarines to get Indian AIP modules

In News:

- Navy gets ready to induct its first conventional submarine.
- Decisions has been reached on an expensive and time consuming process to install Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) modules on the six new Scorpene submarines to be inducted over the next few years.
- It will be installed by the Original Equipment Manufacturer, Naval Group.
- An AIP module is under development by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- **Advantages:** AIP modules give stealth and extended endurance to diesel-electric submarines by allowing them to stay submerged longer.

Key Fact:

- The first Scorpene submarine Kulvari has completed all trials and is ready for induction either by this month-end or early next month.
- The second submarine Khanderi has begun trials, and is likely to be inducted early next year.

2. Despite big reforms in Army, no clarity on sahayak system

In News:

Cabinet approved military reforms:

- Enhances the combat capability and rebalances defence expenditure of the Army.
- Increase the teeth-to-tail ratio, by which 57,000 soldiers would be redeployed to operational duties.
- Neglected reformative measure: no immediate end to the sahayak system that is actually holding up thousands of combat soldiers from active duty.

Sahayaks:

- There are over 30,000 soldiers employed as sahayaks or orderlies both in peacetime and forward locations.
- There have been recommendations, time and again, to end the practice and replace the sahayaks in peacetime locations with civilians freeing up the soldiers for combat roles.
- Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence in the year 2010, had asked the Army to emulate the Navy and Air Force and abolish the "demeaning and humiliating" practice, a colonial legacy.

3. Assam govt. issues AFSPA order for State

In News:

- The Assam government issued orders declaring the State a "disturbed area", imposing the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) for six months.

Key Fact:

- Such orders were earlier issued by the Union Home Ministry, which recently gave up its power and asked the State government to decide on continuing the enforcement of the AFSPA in the State.
- Except in the case of Tripura and Manipur, the Centre had been issuing such notifications for Assam, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya.

AFSPA:

- The AFSPA gives powers to the Army and Central forces deployed in "disturbed areas" to kill anyone acting in contravention of the law, arrest and search any premises without a warrant.
- Controversial provision: provide cover to the Armed Forces from prosecution and legal suits without the Centre's sanction.

Basic Information:

AFSPA:

- Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts (AFSPA), are Acts of the Parliament of India that grant special powers to the Indian Armed Forces in what each act terms "disturbed areas". According to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976 once declared 'disturbed', the area has to maintain status quo for a minimum of 3 months.
- The AFSPA gives powers to the Army and Central forces deployed in "disturbed areas" to kill anyone acting in contravention of law, arrest and search any premises without a warrant.
- It provides cover to forces from prosecution and legal suits without the Centre's sanction.

Active AFSPA:

- Whole of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur (excluding the seven Assembly constituencies of Imphal).
- In Arunachal Pradesh, it is in force in 16 police stations and in Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts bordering Assam.
- Tripura withdrew AFSPA in 2015.
- It is not in force in Meghalaya (except 20 kilometre area along Assam border) and Mizoram.

Supreme Court ruling:

- On July 8, 2016, in a landmark ruling, The Supreme Court of India ended the immunity of the armed forces from prosecution under AFSPA, saying, "It does not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both... This is the requirement of a democracy and the requirement of preservation of the rule of law and the preservation of individual liberties."
- Supreme Court said that any encounter carried out by armed forces in the garb of AFSPA should be subjected to thorough inquiry.

4. Top babus given secure mobiles**Context:**

- Concerns over security of handsets.
- The Computer Emergency Response System- India (CERT-IN), the cyber security arm of the government, sought details of the security process followed by over 30 handset firms selling mobile phones in the country.

In News:

- **Secure communication:** Government has given nearly 500 customised Google Pixel phones with Reliance Jio SIM cards to senior bureaucrats for secure communication.
- The phones, which run on Android OS, have a pre-stored directory that contains the number of all officials above the rank of joint secretary.
- **RAX lines:** The government already uses RAX, a fixed landline secure communication network. The numbers of RAX lines were increased from 1,300 to 5,000.
- **CERT-In recommendations:** security measures must be developed and applied to smart phones from security in multiple layers of hardware/ firmware/ software to the dissemination of information to users.
- **Future move:** The Ministry of Electronics and IT is working on a framework to secure email as well, which are used by government officials.

Kryptowire raised the alarm bell:

- Kryptowire is a security firm.
- It has raised concerns over a Chinese firm transmitting phones, including contacts and text, to servers in China.

5. Army to induct 800 women into military police**Context:**

- Women empowerment.

In News:

- The Army has decided to admit nearly 800 women into the Corps of Military Police in non-officer ranks over the next few years.

- **Key fact:** Army, at present, has women only in the officer ranks, and that too just a few thousand of them.

6. Around the world in seven months**In News:**

- Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, hailed the global circumnavigation being attempted by an all-women Indian Navy crew of 'Navika Sagar Parikrama'.

'Navika Sagar Parikrama'

- The first-ever attempt by an all-women crew to circumnavigate the globe, will have stopovers at four ports — Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands) and Cape Town (South Africa) — for replenishments and repairs.
- It will return to Goa in April next year.
- The crew will collate and update Meteorological/ Ocean/ Wave data on a daily basis for subsequent analysis by research and development organisations. They will also monitor and report marine pollution on the high seas.

7. Rajnath reviews steps for cybersecurity**Context:**

- Growing number of financial frauds using cards and e-wallets.

In News:

- Home Minister Rajnath Singh reviewed the preparedness of agencies to check financial cybercrimes.
- Mr. Singh asked agencies to strengthen surveillance and legal frameworks to check the menace.
- The agencies concerned and representatives of certain States highlighted the steps being taken to arrest the growing trend of cybercrime in the financial sector.
- An inter-ministerial committee may be set up to identify action points and monitor their implementation.
- Key areas identified to be strengthened: Capacity building of various stakeholders such as police officers, judicial officers, forensic scientists as well as officials in the banking sector.

Key Fact:

- As per the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), a total number of 44,679, 49,455 and 50,362 cybersecurity incidents were observed during 2014, 2015 and 2016, respectively.
- The types of cybersecurity incidents included phishing, scanning/probing, website intrusions and defacements, virus/malicious code and denial of service attacks.

8. Govt plans Bill with more teeth to tackle cyber crimes

Context:

- Post-demonetization a spurt in number of cyber crimes has been observed

Key Figures:

- In 2016-17, 998 crore digital transaction were reported as compared to 552 crore in 2015-16 and 369 crore in 2014-15.
- As many as 1,44,496 cyber security attacks have been observed in the country in the past three years.
- CBI in December last year registered multiple FIRs after e-wallet company, Paytm filed a complaint, alleging that its customers were cheated to the tune of Rs 9.41 lakh soon after demonetisation.
- According to RBI data made available to the MHA, as many as 16,468 complaints related to ATM fraud, debit and credit card misuse and net banking hacking were filed with them in 2015-16 as compared to 13,083 in 2014-15.

Key Points:

- So, in order to tackle these problems, the government plans to bring a digital payment Bill to strengthen legal framework and enhance surveillance to check cyber crimes in the financial sector, including frauds targeting cards and e-wallets.
- An inter-ministerial committee headed by the home minister will be setup to first study existing laws to deal with cyber crimes and then propose new legislation.
- The inter-ministerial panel will have representatives from the RBI, financial services, ministry of electronics and information technology, Delhi police and the National Cyber Security Coordinator.
- The proposed legislation will not only deal with punishment and fine but it will also have measures to fix responsibility in cases where digital transactions land in any dispute.
- The Home Minister directed all agencies concerned to take required measures in a time-bound manner and emphasized on the coordination of all agencies in this regard.

Way Forward

- To contain the rising number of cyber attacks— Capacity building of various stakeholders — such as police, judicial officers, forensic scientists as well as officials in the banking sector should be focused upon and both legal and technological steps needs to be taken to address the problem.

9. Govt. plans Made-in-India body armour for soldiers

Context:

- NITI Aayog to set up an inter-ministerial committee to prepare a road map to encourage domestic manufacturing of lightweight body armour for the Army and paramilitary forces.

Keypoints:

- Though India is a major producer and exporter of body armour, its own security forces are often deprived of such equipment, particularly the lightweight ones.
- Making lightweight armour in India will ensure low-cost supplies.
- Presently there is an requirement of over 50,000 bulletproof kits for the police force in the country.
- Indian companies such as the Kanpur-based MKU and Tata Advanced Materials export body armour to armed forces around the world.

10. CCS clears internal security scheme

In News:

- The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹25,000-crore internal security scheme to strengthen the country's law and order mechanism and modernise the police forces.
- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, gave its approval for the implementation of the umbrella scheme, Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF), for 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The new initiatives were being introduced to provide assistance to States for upgradation of police infrastructure, forensic science laboratories, institutions and the equipment available with them to plug critical gaps in the criminal justice system.
- Police stations would be integrated to set up a national database of crime and criminal records. It would be linked with other criminal justice system such as prisons, forensic laboratories and prosecution offices.

Key facts:

- Country's biggest ever internal security scheme.
- The financial outlay over the three-year period is ₹25,060 crore, out of which the Central government's share will be ₹18,636 crore and the States' ₹6,424 crore
- Special provisions had been made under the scheme for internal security, law and order, women's security, availability of modern weapons, mobility of police forces, logistical support, hiring of helicopters and e-prison among others.

Various other initiatives:

- Central budget outlay of ₹10,132 crore had been earmarked for internal security-related expenditure for Jammu and Kashmir, northeastern States and those affected by left wing extremism (LWE).
- A scheme for special Central assistance (SCA) for 35 districts worst hit by LWE had been introduced with an outlay of ₹3,000 crore to tackle the issue of underdevelopment.
- An outlay of ₹100 crore had been earmarked for police infrastructure upgradation, training institutes, investigation facilities, etc. in the northeastern States.

11. Indigenous artillery gun sets new record in range

In News:

- **Setting up World record:** The advanced towed artillery gun system (ATAGS) has set a world record in range by hitting targets at a distance of 48 km.
- ATAGS is being jointly developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the private sector.
- During trial firings, ATAGS registered the longest ever distance of 48.074 km, surpassing the maximum ranges of 35-40 km fired by any artillery gun system in this category.

Development of the Gun

- The development is being done through a consortium based model.
- It was designed by DRDO's Armament Research and Development Establishment (ARDE).
- In addition, Bharat Forge Limited of Kalyani Group, Tata Power Strategic Engineering Division and Mahindra Defence Naval System are involved in a big way, along with the Ordnance Factory Board.

HEALTH ISSUES

1. Nationwide programme to test all TB patients

In News:

- Health authorities plan to commence a nationwide programme to test every tuberculosis (TB) patient for signs of resistance to first-line drugs.
- This new plan could reveal a large number of hidden tuberculosis patients, as well greater numbers of those with multiple infections of TB and HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).
- WHO estimates: as many as a million Indians with TB could be outside government scrutiny.

Key stat:

- In 2015, nine million Indians were tested for suspected tuberculosis and about 900,000 were confirmed to be ailing from it.
- Nearly 3% of new TB cases and 18% of prevalent cases are believed to be drug resistant.
- The WHO's TB statistics for India for 2015, gives an estimated incidence figure of 2.2 million cases of TB for India out of a global incidence of 9.6 million.

Universal Drug Sensitivity Test:

- The new policy, called the Universal Drug Sensitivity Test, will be implemented using a molecular diagnostic test called GeneXpert.
- GeneXpert is a US-developed technology tool being used worldwide since 2010. It can detect the TB bacterium as well check for resistance to rifampicin, one of the standard key TB drugs, within 90 minutes.
- Conventional tests take at least a day or more and require well-trained personnel for similar results.

Why are we unable to eliminate TB?

- Inability to rapidly diagnose multi-drug resistant tuberculosis has long been identified as among the chinks in India's strategy to eliminate tuberculosis.
- Lack of logistics: There are only around 600 GeneXpert devices now in use — roughly one for each district — and this posed a stumbling block to deploying the WHO-recommended kits earlier.

Alternative for GeneXpert:

- GeneXpert kits is very expensive.
- It requires air-conditioned settings and reliable electricity access for optimal output.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is in the process of testing a cheaper alternative to GeneXpert called Truenat MTB, which is reportedly more portable, battery-operated, and performs as well at lower costs.

2. Under-five mortality rate highest in India: Report

In News:

- Global Burden of Disease Study 2016 : In 2016, 9 million children under the age of five died in India — the highest globally

National Family Health Survey-4:

- The under-five mortality rate in India stands at 50 per 1000 live births down from 74 in the 10 years between 2005-06 and 2015-16.
- It ranges from 78 in Uttar Pradesh to 7 in Kerala, one of the best states in the country when it comes to effective health systems.
- Globally, mortality rates have decreased across all age groups over the past five decades, with the largest improvements occurring among children younger than five years.
- At the national level, heterogeneity remains in terms of both level and rate of changes in age-specific mortality; increases in mortality for certain age groups occurred in some locations.
- GBD 2016 has shown that, non communicable diseases constitute seven of the top ten causes of death in India. The leading cause of mortality was ischemic heart disease.

3. India's pharmaceutical research problem

In News:

- Issues which are halting the progress of Pharmaceutical Sector in India

Biggest Challenge

- Lack of sufficient funding and inadequate allocations by the government
- At 0.83% of GDP, India is among the countries with the lowest investment in scientific research

An industry study of 2016

- It examined the extent to which public investment, IPRs and drug pricing policies in 56 countries actively contribute to or detract from innovation in global life-sciences.
- India ranked among the lowest (in the bottom five) due to weak IP protection, lack of data protection for biologics, low investment in R&D and price regulations
- All of these contribute to reduced revenue and therefore reduced future investment in biopharmaceuticals

Investment Attractiveness:

- India ranked No.19 in this 28-nation survey
- Five metrics were used to determine these rankings
 - i. Scientific capabilities and infrastructure
 - ii. Clinical research conditions and framework
 - iii. Regulatory system
 - iv. Market access and financing
 - v. Effective intellectual property protections
- India scored low on almost all metrics except for partial step-ups on scientific capabilities and infrastructure, and clinical research conditions and framework

Chances ahead:

- Rising cardiovascular problems and other chronic diseases, make India a strong candidate to become a future powerhouse of R&D and manufacturing in pharmaceuticals
- In addition, clean water, rising incomes and better health infrastructure for the nation are contributing to an ageing population
- This population will cause a greater demand for different types of pharmaceutical drugs

Low R&D investment:

- The R&D investment as a percentage of sales has been rising for several years and now stands at 6% for some Indian companies
- But it is still well short of the 20% typical of Western pharma companies
- Moreover, innovation in chronic diseases and rare diseases has not yet taken off

Issues with Indian Education System

- The education system is to blame as well, imparting theoretical knowledge with no emphasis on product development and application of theory
- This leads to the deterioration of the knack(capability) for problem-solving and innovation
- Those who manage to keep their enthusiasm alive for research have to deal with the lack of facilities or face delayed funding issues
- Educational and academic institutions should be encouraged to participate in research programmes with funding from both the government as well as the private sector

Need of the hour:

- Four pillars for strengthening the innovation environment in the biopharmaceutical industry
 - i. Human resources
 - ii. Finances
 - iii. Infrastructure
 - iv. Legal and regulatory framework

- Each of these pillars needs a concerted focus and a long-term commitment from industry as well as the government.
- The environment to support the development of these verticals could emerge through our various government-led initiatives such as Skill India, Make in India, Atal Innovation Mission, etc.

Way Forward:

- In order to support consistent innovation, investment has to increase substantially before any tangible outcomes can be envisioned.
- A strong patent system and robust IPRs environment is required to encourage research and to enable foreign pharma companies to bring new products to the market.
- Without the requisite investment and enabling policy environment, patients in India will continue to suffer due to lack of access to cutting-edge medicines and new diagnostics.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Washed out: On the floods in eastern and western India

Context:

- The recent floods in eastern and western India and some suggestions for better disaster management.

Capacity-building programme:

- At least 600 people are dead and thousands of people are displaced due to recent floods in eastern and western India
- To deal with such frequent, destructive weather events we need a massive capacity-building programme.
- There are many actions people need on the ground.
 - i. short-term housing.
 - ii. food and safe water.
 - iii. access to health care and protection for women, children and the elderly.

Problem in using disaster relief funds

- Some States have not been able to use disaster relief funds as intended.
- And the Centre has asked them to set off the unutilised portion when making fresh claims.

Mitigate Damage:

- A review of the deployment of National Disaster Response Force teams near waterbodies is needed.
- The experience NDRF together with data compiled by the Central Water Commission can reveal the hotspots where better management can mitigate damage.

The way forward

- Governments cannot expect that people with good incomes will take calamitous losses, with neither social support nor financial instruments available to rebuild lives.
- A vigorous monsoon is vital for the economy, but governments should be prepared to deal with the consequences of excess rainfall.

2. Behind Mumbai flood, cruel August

Context:

- Ceaseless shower in the financial capital of India over the last two days has paralyzed the city.

Keypoints:

- Mumbai recorded 315.8 mm of rainfall between 8:30 am and 8:30 pm Tuesday.
- Had so much rainfall occurred in May or June, the condition in Mumbai might have been less severe, says meteorological office.

- Despite these rains being forecast well in advance, no mitigative/preventive steps were taken.
- Mumbai has received about 2,000 mm of rainfall this monsoon season (since June), which is more than normal.
- Larger impact of the rains on city life could be due to the moisture saturated soil whose ability to absorb water is diminished.

Reason behind Intense rainfall

- The strong low-pressure area that had developed over southern Madhya Pradesh, is one of the several reasons behind the intense monsoon this year.
- The regional distribution of monsoon rainfall has been quite even.
- Only Kerala, south-interior Karnataka, Vidarbha, eastern Madhya Pradesh, western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi, and Punjab have had deficient rainfall this season.
- Bengaluru had received massive rains previous week, about 180 mm in a single day, and was faced with similar flooding and resultant chaos.
- Earlier, huge parts of Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha have also faced floods this season.

3. When it pours

Context:

- The total rainfall (2017) in the country, is beyond the IMD's forecast of a "normal" monsoon.
- The flood governance in India is still about ad hoc relief measures. Its time to change.

Keypoints:

- Parts of Assam, Bihar and Gujarat are submerged in historic levels of floodwater.
- Urban areas like Mumbai and Bengaluru were lashed with heavy rainfall.
- Mount Abu, got over 50% of its annual rainfall in two days.
- Bengaluru got about 30 per cent of its monsoon rainfall on one day.
- Chandigarh received nearly 15 per cent of its annual rainfall in a few hours.
- The weather patterns during this rainy season where days of severe downpour sandwiched between spells of dry weather, raise questions about our understanding of the monsoon, as well as about the ways in which we prepare for and deal with floods.

Study and Warnings:

- A 2013 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report warned that Mumbai remains vulnerable to rainfall of the kind that led to the 2005 floods.
- The indiscriminate destruction of wetlands has bargained the city's capacity to deal with floods which holds true for Bengaluru, Guwahati, and several other cities of the country.

Governance efforts

- Steps taken for the restoration of wetlands at the center of flood control programs remains minimal.
- Flood governance in the country has not gone beyond ad hoc relief measures and building embankments.
- Thus it's the need of the hour that we require fresh thinking on how to prepare for the monsoons and deal with floods.

4. Development must be climate-smart**Context:**

- Issues related to Extreme Weather Events.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report.
- Climate models have indicated with high confidence that climate change will lead to an increase in extreme rainfall events
- According to the IPCC Special Report on Extreme Events, global warming leads to "changes in the frequency, intensity, spatial extent, duration, and timing of extreme weather and climate events, and can result in unprecedented extreme weather and climate events".

Understanding the extreme events:

- The main reason for understanding extreme events is to help policymakers, emergency responders and local communities to plan and prepare for them.
- Cities could be laid out to reduce flooding by following natural contours, drainage and tank systems.
- Emergency responders should be well prepared to transport and care for people who may become stranded during disasters.

The concept of 'attribution'

- Research that tries to understand this relationship between anthropogenic climate change and extreme events in particular locations is called "attribution".

Rainfall in Chennai and Climate Change:

- According to experts, the 494 mm rain in Chennai was a rare event, with less than a 0.2% chance of occurring in any given year.
- The Chennai flood of 2015 did not have a clear climate signature to show that it was due to warming of the earth.

Possible reasons behind the actual patterns of flooding in Chennai, Mumbai and Houston

- These were due to several human-induced activities
 - i. rampant increase in built-up area across natural drainage channels
 - ii. the diversion or damming of rivers upstream leading to sediment transport and siltation
 - iii. coastal subsidence and other effects of development

Urbanization behind the scene

- The spread of infrastructure such as roads, highways, buildings, residential complexes, tiled or asphalt-covered land obstructs rainwater from percolating(drain) into the soil
- Often there are further barriers that block movement of water and increase flooding.

Issues with the Infrastructure Development and Urbanization

- In many parts of the world, construction in cities or in urbanising areas does not take into consideration the existing topography, surface water bodies, stream flows, etc.
- In much of India, urban growth over the past few decades has ignored the hydrology of the land.
- For decades, urbanisation has ignored ecological principles associated with water bodies, vegetation, biodiversity and topography.

The Way Forward

- Development needs to be climate-smart, but also avoid social and institutional challenges such as moral hazard.
- Construction on existing lake beds and other waterbodies needs to be removed or redesigned to allow flood drainage along natural water channels.
- As the frequency of extreme weather events increases around the world, losses in rich countries are higher in terms of GDP.
- But in terms of the number of people at risk, it is the poor countries that suffer the most.
- Those who are the most vulnerable and the poorest end up bearing the brunt of the burdens of climate change and mal-development, which together operate to worsen impacts.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

1. World University Rankings 2018: IISc ranked highest from India, overall ranking falls

Context:

- World University Rankings 2018
- Indian institutes performed well in the World University Rankings 2018
- The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) was the highest ranked institute from the country, but it slipped from the 201-250 band to the 251-300 one
- Possible reason behind this fall(of IISc): The fall was attributed to a drop in its research influence score and research income

Disappointing trends:

- Leading universities in other Asian territories such as China, Hong Kong and Singapore are consistently rising up the rankings
- But it is disappointing that India has declined in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings amid increasing global competition

2. 'Recurving' cyclones dried August rains

Context:

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had predicted normal monsoon rains in August.
- Re-curving of Western Pacific tropical cyclones may have played a role in reducing the August rainfall

In News:

- Reason for drying up of monsoon rains in August across India: A strange pattern of tropical cyclones (TC) noticed in the Western Pacific.
- Typically August will be the second most bountiful monsoon month after July.

Process:

- Normal: During the monsoon months, cyclones in the Western Pacific move westwards towards India and aid rain-bearing systems over the sub-continent.

Present scenario:

- But during some years they 'recurve', or start to swing north-east, and do not give as much of a push to the rains as they do in the good monsoon years.
- This re-curving frequently happens during the El Nino years but this time it inexplicably occurred when an El Nino hasn't yet taken shape.
- **What is El Nino?** El Nino years are those when sea surface temperatures in the east equatorial Pacific rise, and often dampen the monsoon.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana' has been launched for
 - A. Providing housing loan to poor people at cheaper interest rates
 - B. Promoting women's self-help groups in backward areas
 - C. Promoting financial inclusion in the country
 - D. None of the above
2. In the 'Index of Eight Core Industries', which one of the following is given the highest weight?
 - A. Coal production
 - B. Electricity generation
 - C. Fertilizer production
 - D. Steel Production
3. Which one of the following issues the 'Global Economic Prospectus' report periodically?
 - A. The Asian Development Bank
 - B. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
 - C. The US Federal Reserve Bank
 - D. The World Bank
4. The area known as 'Golan Heights' sometimes appears in the news in the context of the events related to
 - A. Central Asia
 - B. Middle East
 - C. South-East Asia
 - D. Central Africa
5. In India, the steel production industry requires the import of
 - A. Saltpetre
 - B. Rock phosphate
 - C. Coking coal
 - D. All of the above
6. The National Nutrition Week will be observed throughout the country from 1st to 7th September. Consider the following statements with respect to it
 1. The theme of the National Nutrition Week for 2017 is "Optimal Infant & Young Child Feeding Practices: Better Child Health".
 2. The basic objective of this annual event is to intensify awareness generation on the importance of nutrition for healthSelect the correct option:
 - A. Only 1
 - B. Only 2
 - C. 1 and 2
 - D. None
7. Which of the following judgements are related to section 377 of IPC?
 1. Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi (2009)
 2. Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation (2013) caseSelect the correct option:
 - A. Only 1
 - B. Only 2
 - C. 1 and 2
 - D. None
8. Consider the following statements with respect to National Commission for Backward Classes (Repeal) Bill, 2017
 1. The bill is meant to upgrade the Backward Classes Commission from a statutory body to a constitutional body.
 2. The Constitution (123rd Amendment) Bill, 2017, providing for setting up of a National Commission for Backward Classes, is passed by the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha awaiting the President's assent.Select the correct option:
 - A. Only 1
 - B. Only 2
 - C. 1 and 2
 - D. None

9. Which of the following statements is/are provisions found in the Whistleblowers Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2015?

1. It prohibits disclosures to be made if they are covered by the Official Secrets Act, 1923
2. It prohibits the reporting of a corruption-related disclosure if it falls under certain prohibited categories which are modelled on those under the RTI Act

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

10. The 2017 session of the "IAS Conference" is being held in Paris, France. This conference is related to which one of the following subjects/issues?

- A. Administration
- B. HIV/AIDS
- C. Antarctic ice melt
- D. Solar flares

11. Which among the following vaccines come under Pentavalent vaccine

- A. Diphtheria, Pertussis or whooping cough, tetanus, Hepatitis B and Hib vaccines.
- B. Diphtheria, Pertussis/whooping cough ,polio), Hepatitis B and Hib vaccines.
- C. Diphtheria, Pertussis/whooping cough and tetanus), Hepatitis C and Hib vaccines.
- D. Diphtheria, Pertussis/whooping cough and tetanus), Hepatitis A and Hib vaccines.

12. Consider the following statement with reference to Egyptian vultures, which was in news recently.

1. It is the largest among all the vultures.
2. It is an endangered species as per IUCN's Red data book.
3. It is also called as white scavengers

Choose the correct answer:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. All are correct

13. Consider the following statements with reference to Belle-II experiment which was in news recently

1. Belle-II is designed to study violations of the Standard Model of particle physics.
2. Belle-II experiment is being conducted at IISC ,Bangalore

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

14. Identify the correct Statement

- A. The Representation of the People Act bar political parties from receiving foreign funds.
- B. The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act bar political parties from receiving foreign funds.
- C. Both A and B
- D. Neither A nor B

15. Consider the following statement with reference to The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority

1. It is a statutory body
2. It controls the prices of Pharmaceutical drugs in India.

Choose the correct answer

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

16. Consider the following statements

1. In Multidrug Resistant Tuberculosis, patients do not respond to second-line of drugs.
2. Drugs like Bedaquiline and Delamanid are not adequately available in India's national healthcare system.
3. India shoulders the highest TB burden in the world

Choose the correct answer

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. All are correct
- D. 1 and 3 only

17. Consider the following statements

1. Railway Development Authority would involve in policy making of Railways.
2. Railway Development Authority would involve in setting safety standards for the railways.
3. Railway Development Authority would impose tariff on Indian Railways

Choose the correct answer

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. All are correct
- D. None

18. Who is the present Indian member of the International Court Of Justice?

- A. Dalveer Bhandari
- B. N.V Ramana
- C. Amitava Roy
- D. Arjan Kumar Sikri

19. The Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane is approved by the

- A. Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs
- B. Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices.
- C. Agricultural Produce Market Committee.
- D. Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture

20. What is RIO+20 Conference, often mentioned in the news?

- A. It is the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.
- B. It is a Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization.
- C. It is a Conference of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate change.
- D. It is a Conference of the Member Countries of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

21. Recently Southern Bird Wing butterfly was approved as State Butterfly of which State?

- A. Karnataka
- B. Madhya Pradesh
- C. Kerala
- D. Tamil Nadu

22. How do most insects respire?

- A. Skin
- B. Gills
- C. Lungs
- D. Tracheal System

23. Choose the correct statement

- A. Both hydrogen and Atom bomb works on Nuclear fission principle
- B. Both hydrogen and Atom bomb works on Nuclear fusion principle
- C. Hydrogen bomb works on fission ,where as atom bomb works on fusion principle
- D. Hydrogen bomb works on fusion ,where as atom bomb works on fission principle

24. What do you mean by LIDAR?

- A. It is a new IT cloud computing technique.
- B. It is a new semiconductor fabricating technique.
- C. It is a surveying method
- D. None of the above.

25. SHAKTI, a scheme recently approved by the Union Cabinet, is

- A. A rural women-empowerment initiative by inculcating in them a habit of savings and proper utilisation of financial resource
- B. A special loan scheme aimed at supporting entrepreneurship among urban women by providing certain concession
- C. A campaign to convince state governments to devolve 'ownership' of planning and development functions in panchayat samitis and gram panchayat
- D. A new coal allocation policy for the power sector

26. VAJRA (Visiting Advanced Joint Research) Faculty scheme is being implemented by which agency?

- A. The Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB)
- B. Council of Scientific & Industrial Research
- C. Indian Institute of Science
- D. None of the above

27. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana is implemented by

- A. Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation.
- B. Ministry of Rural Development
- C. Ministry of Panchayath Raj Insitution
- D. None of the above

28. Consider the statements about classification MSME sector.

1. In manufacturing, investments not exceeding Rs.25.00 Lakhs are considered as small enterprise.
2. In services, investments not exceeding Rs.10.00 Lakhs are considered as small enterprise.

Which of the above statements is/are correct ?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

29. Consider the following statement with reference to Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsava.

1. Held at Arunachal Pradesh
2. Main aim is to promote traditional folkdance and music

Choose the correct answer

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

30. Which ministry is responsible for implementation of Foreign Contribution of Regulation Act

- A. Ministry of Finance
- B. Ministry of Home affairs
- C. Ministry of Corporate affairs
- D. None of the above.

31. Doha Development Round is often in news. It relates to which of the following ?

- A. Talks regarding international monetary system
- B. Talks regarding refugee crisis
- C. Talks at WTO regarding world trade
- D. None

32. Consider the statements :

1. Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) is a for-profit organisation formed to create a platform for all the concerned parties.
2. The portal will be accessible to the central government which will track down every transaction on its end.

Which of the following statements is/are correct ?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

33. Which among the following are groundwater pollutants

1. Fluoride
2. Arsenic
3. Chromium
4. Lead

Choose the correct answer

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 1,2 and 4
- C. 1,2 and 3
- D. All of the above

34. Which among the following is/ are the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- A. Lack of regular circadian sleep
- B. Struggling to concentrate
- C. Having too much energy
- D. All the above

35. Shanghai cooperation organization (SCO) is headquartered in which city?

- A. Shanghai
- B. Beijing
- C. Xinxiang
- D. Kabul

36. Identify the correct statement

1. Raja Ampat is known for one of the world's most biodiverse marine habitats.
2. Raja Ampat lies in eastern part of Indonesian group of archipelago.

Choose the correct answer

- A. Only a
- B. Only b
- C. Both a and b
- D. Neither a nor b

37. Identify the correct statement with reference to Latent TB?

- A. Drug resistant TB is known as Latent TB.
- B. Latent TB is a bacteria which is there in all of us, but it is our body's immunity that converts the latent bacteria active.
- C. Recently announced National Strategic Plan focuses on Latent TB eradication.
- D. Both B and C

38. Eczema and Callosities diseases associated with

- A. Skin
- B. Lung
- C. Muscle tissues
- D. Bone

39. 'Larson C' ice shelf has been in the news in recent times for which one of the following reasons?

- A. A huge iceberg, expected to be one of the largest ever recorded, is poised to break off from this ice shelf that is located in Antarctica.
- B. It is one of the largest proven oil deposits beneath it in the Arctic.
- C. It is being subject to a man-made breakup (collapse) by Russia so as to open up the Northern Sea Route all year, making it a commercially viable route.
- D. None of the above

40. The approximate age of Aravallis range is:

- A. 370 million years
- B. 470 million years
- C. 570 million years
- D. 670 million years

41. How do District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) help in the reduction of rural poverty in India?

1. DRDAs act as Panchayati Raj Institutions in certain specified backward regions of the country.
2. DRDAs undertake area-specific scientific study of the causes of poverty and malnutrition and prepare detailed remedial measures.
3. DRDAs secure inter-sectoral and interdepartmental coordination and cooperation for effective implementation of anti-poverty programmes.
4. DRDAs watch over and ensure effective utilization of the funds intended for antipoverty programmes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct ?

- A. 3 and 4 only
- B. 1, 2, 3 and 4
- C. 4 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3 only

42. Birds usually have a single ____

- A. Kidney
- B. Lung
- C. Testis
- D. Ovary

43. 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

44. 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

45. Solar cycle lasts on an average for

- A. Eleven years
- B. Twelve years
- C. Ten years
- D. None of the above

46. The area known as 'Rakhine state' sometimes appears in the news in the context of the events related to which country

- A. Bangladesh
- B. Thailand
- C. Myanmar
- D. Mongolia

47. The provision in Fifth Schedule and Sixth schedule in the constitution of India are made in order to

- A. Protect the interests of Scheduled Tribes.
- B. Determine the boundaries between states.
- C. Determine the powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats
- D. Protect the interests of all the border states.

48. In the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, an initiative of six countries, which of the following is/ are not a participant/ participants?.

- 1. Bangladesh
- 2. Cambodia
- 3. China
- 4. Myanmar
- 5. Thailand

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- A. 1 only
- B. 2,3 and 4
- C. 1 and 3
- D. 1,2 and 5

49. Which of the following statements is/are correct?.

- 1. There is a time limit of 30 days to file a Curative petition.
- 2. The Curative petition is circulated among three senior most judges.

Choose the correct answer

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

50. In India, which one of the following states has the largest inland saline wetland?

- A. Gujarat
- B. Haryana
- C. Madhya Pradesh
- D. Rajasthan

51. The river most mentioned in early Vedic literature is:

- A. Sindhu
- B. Sutudri
- C. Sarasvati
- D. Ganga

52. The balance of payments of a country is a systematic record of:

- A. All import and export transactions of a country during a given period of time, normally a year
- B. Goods exported from a country during a year
- C. Economic transaction between the government of one country to another
- D. Capital movements from one country to another

53. Which of the following constitute Capital Account?.

- 1. Foreign Loans
- 2. Foreign Direct Investment
- 3. Private Remittances
- 4. Portfolio Investment

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- A. 1, 2 and 3
- B. 1, 2 and 4
- C. 2, 3 and 4
- D. 1, 3 and 4

54. Consider the following statement with reference to Cartosat-2 series satellite, which was launched recently by ISRO.

- 1. Cartosat-2 is a remote sensing satellite.
- 2. Cartosat-2 will be used for Land Information Systems (LIS) and Geographical Information System (GIS) applications.
- 3. Cartosat-2 is a weather forecasting satellite.

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- A. 1 only
- B. 2only
- C. 1and 3
- D. 1 and 2

55. Recently government introduced pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) under its Universal immunization programme, PCV is against.

- A. Pneumonia and meningitis.
- B. Pneumonia and polio
- C. Pneumonia and TB
- D. None of the above.

56. "WannaCry" is a.

- A. Malware
- B. Part of Cry NGO.
- C. Software programme developed by U.S.
- D. None of the above

57. Deficiency of Vitamin A can lead to.

- A. Poor vision
- B. Bleeding of gums
- C. Soft bones
- D. None of the above

58. "Oilzapping" is a .

- A. New technique used in extraction of oil from wells.
- B. New technique to get rid of oil spills using Chemicals.
- C. New technique to get rid of oil spills using bacteria.
- D. None of the above

59. Aedes aegypti transmits which among the following .

- A. Dengue, chikungunya , yellow fever and HIV.
- B. Dengue, chikungunya and yellow fever.
- C. Dengue, chikungunya , yellow fever and Zika virus.
- D. Dengue, chikungunya , yellow fever and H1N1.

60. 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

61. 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

62. 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

63. 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

64. Raut Nacha is folk dance performed mainly by the tribal communities of which state?

- A. Rajasthan
- B. Jammu & Kashmir
- C. Assam
- D. Chhattisgarh

65. Which of the following protects the body against infectious disease and foreign invaders?

- A. Leukocytes
- B. Red blood cells
- C. Endoplasmic reticulum (ER)
- D. Golgi apparatus

66. '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.

67. The first Indian satellite built in our country, was named after a 5th Century A.D. astronomer. Which of the following is/are texts authored by this astronomer?

- 1. Aryabhatibhashya
- 2. Brihatsamhita
- 3. Aryasiddhanta

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 3 only

68. NAVIC is an autonomous regional satellite navigation system that provides accurate

- A. Real-time positioning
- B. Timing services.
- C. Both A and B
- D. Neither A nor B

69. 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

70. Consider the following with reference to Paika rebellion

- 1. It took place in the year 1817
- 2. It is basically a uprising of soldiers against the land policy adopted by Britishers
- 3. It was led by Buxi Jagabandhu

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. All are correct

71. Chinnar Wildlife sanctuary is located in which state?

- A. Kerala
- B. Tamil Nadu
- C. Andhra Pradesh
- D. Karnataka

72. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- 1. Finance Ministry is responsible for implementing Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA)
- 2. Kundankullam Power plant is located in Andhra Pradesh.
- 3. A Lok Sabha election candidate can accept foreign donations for campaign after taking necessary approval from Chief Election Commissioner.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. 1 and 3
- D. None of the above

73. Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- 1. The Olympic flag has a white background, with five interlaced rings in the centre: blue, yellow, orange, green and red.
- 2. The color in Olympic flag appears on all the national flags of the world

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

74. Pakistan has raised objections in the past to India's hydroelectric project on the Kishanganga. The Kishanganga is a tributary of river

- A. Indus
- B. Jhelum
- C. Chenab
- D. Ravi

75. Consider the following statements

- 1. Chakmas and Hajongs were originally residents of the erstwhile West Pakistan
- 2. The Chakmas follow Hinduism, whereas Hajongs follow Buddhism.

Identify the correct statements from the option given below:

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

76. The states in India which require Inner Line permit are:

- A. Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland
- B. Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and J & K
- C. Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Tripura
- D. Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Assam

77. The Indra Exercise is a joint military exercise between India and

- A. Japan
- B. Sri Lanka
- C. Mauritius
- D. Russia

78. Under a bilateral mechanism established in 2006, China is expected to share hydrological data with India with respect to which river

- A. Brahmaputra
- B. Sutlej
- C. Both A and B
- D. Neither A nor B

79. Consider the following statements

- 1. Article 164, provided for limiting the number of ministers in the state cabinet.
- 2. Article 164 was inserted in the Constitution based on the recommendation of the National Commission for Review of the Working of the Constitution headed by former Chief Justice of India, M.N. Venkatachaliah

Identify the correct statements from the option given below:

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

80. 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.

81. 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

82. Which of these is NOT one of the major styles or schools of ancient Indian art?

- A. Amravati
- B. Mathura
- C. Gandhara
- D. Sarnath

83. 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

84. Section 139AA inserted in the Income Tax Act, which was in news recently deals with?

- A. Provision of Aadhaar being mandatory for getting a PAN.
- B. Provision of Aadhaar being mandatory for getting a GST number.
- C. Provision of Aadhaar being mandatory for getting IT rebates.
- D. None of the above

85. Over the last decade, the country that is the World's largest receiver of remittances is

- A. USA
- B. India
- C. Russia
- D. Canada

86. The Indian constitution prohibits discrimination between individuals on the basis of

- A. Gender and caste only
- B. Gender, caste, religion, race and place of birth
- C. Gender, education, caste and place of birth
- D. Caste, education, religion and race only

87. Under the SMARTGRAM initiative of Rashtrapati (President) Bhavan, what is considered as a 'smart gram (village)'?

- A. A village that is on the transition to become a municipal area
- B. A village where a majority of the population is digitally literate
- C. A village having required physical and social infrastructure governed with a layer of smart information and communication systems
- D. A village that is close to sub-urban areas of smart cities

88. The National Mission on Cultural Mapping of India intends to

- 1. Create repository of information about cultural assets
- 2. Launch massive cultural awareness campaigns
- 3. Open a direct channel of communication of artists with the Government
- 4. Hold talent hunt competitions from Block level to National level

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 and 4 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

89. Consider the following about The Energy Resources Institute (TERI).

- 1. It is a non-profit policy research organisation.
- 2. It is an attached agency of the International Centre for Climate Governance (ICCG).

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

90. With reference to unique BRICS countries initiatives, consider the following statements:

- 1. BRICS Network University (NU) is an open educational project and does not involve establishment of rigid organizational forms such as a secretariat.
- 2. BRICS Think Tanks Council (BTIC) comprises research organizations from BRICS countries including Observer Research Foundation (ORF) from India.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

91. Consider the following statements:

1. NHB Residex is a set of benchmarks that aims to track housing price indicators across Indian cities.
2. NHB Residex is designed by a technical advisory committee comprising Government representatives, lenders and property market player.

Choose the correct statements from the option given below:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

92. Consider the following statement with reference to constitution of DNA profiling board, intended by The DNA Based Technology (Use Regulation) Bill, 2017:

1. The board is supposed to be the regulatory authority that will grant accreditation to DNA laboratories.
2. Board will advise central and state governments on all issues relating to DNA laboratories.
3. Board will be the authority to make recommendations on ethical and human rights, including privacy, issues related to DNA testing.

Choose the correct statements from the options given below:

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 1 and 3
- C. 2 and 3
- D. All are correct

93. Consider the following statements:

1. SWAYAM stands for Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds.
2. SWAYAM is a programme of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
3. SWAYAM is an Indian electronic e-education platform which proposes to offer courses from the high school stage to Post-Graduate stage in an interactive electronic platform.

Choose the correct statements from the options given below:

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 1 and 3
- C. 2 and 3
- D. All are correct

94. In a democratic state, government derives its ultimate sovereignty from

- A. Citizens of the state.
- B. Territory of the State.
- C. Laws governing the state.
- D. Parliament.

95. With reference to the rights and responsibilities of the Attorney General of India, consider the following::

1. He has right of audience in all courts within the territory of India.
2. He has the right to speak and take part in the proceeding of a joint sitting of the Parliament.
3. He is entitled to vote on crucial national resolutions and motions in Rajya Sabha, excluding legislations.
4. He can be made a member of any parliamentary committee with a right to discuss and vote.
5. He is not allowed to take up private practice as long as he is an incumbent.

Choose the correct statements from the option given below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 3 and 4 only
- C. 1, 4 and 5 only
- D. 2, 3 and 5 only

96. They introduced the art of excavating temples from the rock, and the Dravidian style of temple architecture began with their rule. They were?

- A. Cheras
- B. Pallavas
- C. Eastern Chalukyas
- D. Jaffna

97. 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

98. 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

99. Consider the following statements with reference to NIA.

1. The agency is empowered to deal with terror related crimes across states with permission from the states.
2. NIA was created after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks.

Choose the correct statements from the options given below:

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

100. A person shall be disqualified for being chosen as, and for being, a member of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a State, if.

1. He/she holds any office of profit under the Government of India or the Government of any State specified in the First Schedule, other than an office declared by the Legislature of the State by law not to disqualify its holder;
2. He/she is of unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent court;
3. He/ she is an undischarged insolvent;
4. He/ she is not a citizen of India, or has voluntarily acquired the citizenship of a foreign State, or is under any acknowledgement of allegiance or adherence to a foreign State;

Identify the correct statements from the options given below:

- A. 1 and 3
- B. 1 and 4
- C. 1,2 and 4
- D. All are correct

101. Buddhist Viharas are

- A. A monument to meditate and chant for the entire Sangha.
- B. Permanent shelters or monasteries for dwelling and rest.
- C. Divine extensions of stupas.
- D. Sites containing relics of Buddha.

102. SATH - 'Sustainable Action for Transforming Human capital' initiative of NITI Aayog focuses on

- A. Creating 'role model' states for health systems.
- B. Revamping higher education.
- C. Building workforce for the future in areas of cutting edge technology.
- D. Eradicating manual scavenging.

103. The 'Doctrine of Lapse', in Modern Indian history, is associated with

- A. Lord Wellesley
- B. Lord William Bentick
- C. Lord Canning
- D. Lord Dalhousie

104. Which among the following agency monitors the anti – money laundering activities?

- A. Financial Intelligence unit
- B. Enforcement Directorate
- C. Central Bureau of Intelligence
- D. Reserve Bank of India.

105. India Water Stewardship Network and Alliance for Water Stewardship is a network created by

- A. U.N
- B. W.H.O
- C. WWF
- D. IMF

106. As per the Constitutional Allocation of Powers, who has the jurisdiction to impose tax on agricultural income?

- A. Union government.
- B. State government.
- C. Local government.
- D. Both Union as well as State government.

107. Consider the following statement with reference to Mission Kakatiya, which was in news recently..

1. It is a flagship programme of Andhra Pradesh State government.
2. It is a poverty eradication programme.

Choose the correct statement:

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

108. Consider the following statement with reference to the recently launched NASA's Super balloon.

1. It started its journey from U.S.
2. It is used to detect ultra-high energy cosmic particles from beyond the galaxy.

Choose the correct statement:

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

109. Consider the following statement with reference to Gasification process.

1. Gasification is a process that converts organic or fossil fuel based carbonaceous materials into carbon monoxide, hydrogen and carbon dioxide.
2. It produces a gas known as Syngas.

Choose the correct statement:

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

110. Hambantota deep-sea port was recently seen in news because

- A. Sri Lanka agreed to sell a strategic stake in this port to China.
- B. A Major oil spill here was treated by genetically engineered bacteria.
- C. India has signed a MoU with Seychelles to develop this port for defense related purposes.
- D. It will be used as an alternate transit to the Straits of Malacca.

111. With reference to "flammable ice", recently seen in news, consider the following statements:

1. It consists of methane trapped within water crystals.
2. It is another name for permafrost.
3. All of its reserves are trapped in plateaus at higher latitudes.
4. India is considering it as an alternative energy source.

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. 1, 3 and 4 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. None.

112. Muntra, recently rolled out by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) is a/an

- A. Unmanned remotely operated tank
- B. Stealth land mine
- C. Indigenously developed fifth generation aircraft
- D. Airborne Radar system for fighter planes

113. Consider the following statements:

1. SWAYAM stands for Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds.
2. SWAYAM is a programme of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
3. SWAYAM is an Indian electronic e-education platform which proposes to offer courses from the high school stage to Post-Graduate stage in an interactive electronic platform.

Choose the correct statements from the options given below.

- A. 1 and 2
- B. 1 and 3
- C. 2 and 3
- D. All are correct

114. Consider the following statements with reference to The marginal cost of funds based lending rate (MCLR):

1. It refers to the minimum interest rate of a bank below which it cannot lend, except in some cases allowed by the RBI.
2. It refers to the maximum interest rate of a bank above which it cannot lend, except in some cases allowed by the RBI.
3. MCLR describes the method by which the minimum interest rate for loans is determined by a bank.
4. MCLR actually describes the method by which the maximum interest rate for loans is determined by a bank

Choose the correct statements from the options given below.

- A. 1 and 4
- B. 1 and 3
- C. 2 and 4
- D. 1 and 4

115. With reference to manufacture of firecrackers in India, consider the following:

1. It is mandatory for firecracker manufacturers to mention the composition of explosives and their quantity on the packet.
2. It is not mandatory to mention the consequential effects of fireworks on the environment and human health on the label of the packet

Which of the above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

116. The VAJRA scheme was launched by the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) to

- A. Connect the Indian academic and research and development (R&D) systems to the best of global science and scientists
- B. Develop anti-neurotoxins that can be used to neutralize agents used in a potential chemical warfare
- C. Provide mobile air-defence guards to marine ships used as warships
- D. Increase participation from local ground level innovations to mainstream science and technology.

117. Pancha Siddhantika, a work of Varahamihira, deals with

- A. Geographical domains of India
- B. Astronomical systems
- C. Occult and mysticism
- D. Principles of social living

118. Sangam poems mention the term muvendar. It was used for

- A. Land allotted to temples by Kings
- B. Administrative arrangements made to felicitate scholars of Tamil
- C. Heads of three ruling dynasties of Southern India
- D. Classical commentary on Vedas

119. Consider the following statements about Public interest litigation (PIL):.

1. A PIL may be introduced in a court of law by the court itself (suo motu).
2. A PIL can be introduced only by the aggrieved party.

Which of the above statements is/are correct ?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None

120. What are Shell Companies?

1. Shell Company is a corporate entity without active business operations or significant assets.
2. There is clear definition of shell companies in the Companies Act, 2013.

Select the correct option

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

121. Consider the following statements with respect to Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):

1. Prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology
2. Promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy
3. Nuclear disarmament.

Which of the above mentioned options are the objectives of NPT?

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

122. Consider the following statements with respect to Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI):

1. TRAI is an independent regulator of the telecommunications business in India. It came into existence by the Act of the Parliament in 1997.
2. Its mandate is to deliver a fair and transparent environment for fair competition in telecom market.

Select the correct option

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

123. Consider the following statements about unemployment:

1. Cyclical unemployment occurs when there is not enough aggregate demand in the economy to provide jobs for everyone who wants to work.
2. Frictional unemployment occurs when people change from one to another and remain unemployed during this interval period.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

124. Consider the following statements about Index of industrial production:

1. It measures the growth of industrial production and GDP growth of industries in INDIA.
2. IIP is released by The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM).
3. IIP is released on monthly basis.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

125. Which of the following conditions is/are conducive for the formation of tropical cyclones?

1. Large and continuous supply of warm and moist air.
2. Large value of coriolis force.
3. Inflow of air at upper level of atmosphere.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

126. Identify the correct statement with reference to Khurki system.

- A. It is a irrigation system adopted in South Asia
- B. It is a system of land revenue adopted by Mughals
- C. It is a system used by the British planters to compel the farmers to sow indigo.
- D. None of the above

127. Recently Health Ministry of Government of India, introduced new vaccine - Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine. This particular vaccine is used to treat.

- A. Hib pneumonia
- B. Pneumococcal pneumonia
- C. Diarrhoea
- D. Polio

128. Which among the following vaccines come under Pentavalent vaccine.

- Diphtheria, Pertussis or whooping cough, tetanus, Hepatitis B and Hib vaccines.
- diphtheria, Pertussis/whooping cough, (polio), Hepatitis B and Hib vaccines.
- diphtheria, Pertussis/whooping cough and tetanus), Hepatitis C and Hib vaccines.
- diphtheria, Pertussis/whooping cough and tetanus), Hepatitis A and Hib vaccines.

129. Consider the following statement with reference to Egyptian vultures, which was in news recently:

- It is the largest among all the vultures.
- It is an endangered species as per IUCN's Red data book.
- It is also called as white scavengers

Which of the above is/are correct?

- 1 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 2 and 3 only
- All are correct

130. 'UDAN', recently seen in the news, is a scheme launched by the Government of India. This scheme is

- A scholarship instituted to award meritorious students belonging to Economically Weaker Sections among the upper castes in the state of Gujarat.
- The Railway Ministry's efforts to increase the average train speed along the existing tracks.
- The Civil Aviation Ministry's Regional Connectivity Scheme.
- A collaboration of the Railways Ministry and the Environment Ministry aimed at reducing road transport's share in freight traffic and its concomitant increase in railway's share.

131. Consider the following statement with reference to Comptroller and Auditor general of India:

- Comptroller and Auditor General of India shall be appointed by the President.
- CAG is directly removed by President based on the recommendation of Council of ministers.
- CAG expenditure is not a charged upon consolidated fund of India.
- CAG has to subscribe to an oath administered by President before entering his office.

Choose the correct answer

- 1 and 4
- 1 and 2
- 1 and 3
- All are correct

132. Consider the following statement with reference to Enemy Property Bill, which was in news recently:

- The Bill declares transfer of enemy property by the enemy to be void.
- Retrospective transfers that have occurred before or after 1968 are to be nullified
- The Bill allows civil courts and other authorities to deal with the disputes related to enemy property.

Choose the correct answer

- Only 1
- 1 and 2
- 1 and 3
- All are incorrect

133. Border road organization is under

- Ministry of Home affairs
- Ministry of Road Transport and Highways
- Ministry of Defense
- None of the above

134. Identify the correct statements:

- Both African male and female elephant's possess tusk.
- Only male elephants in India possess tusk.

Choose the correct answer

- Only 1
- Only 2
- Both are correct
- Neither A nor B.

135. Consider the following statement with reference to Maternity Benefits Bill, which was in news recently.:

1. The Bill covers both the organized as well as unorganized women employees
2. The Bill enhanced paid maternity leave for women in the unorganized sector to 26 weeks from 12.

Choose the correct answer

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both are correct
- D. Neither A nor B.

136. Identify the correct statements.

1. Coral and zooxanthellae are symbiotically linked.
2. It is the zooxanthellae which gives color to the coral

Choose the correct answer

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both are correct
- D. Neither A nor B.

137. Identify the correct statements.

1. Warm water temperature results in Coral bleaching.
2. Corals can survive a bleaching event.
3. Usage of Sunscreen lotion by those who take sun bath, results in coral bleaching.

Choose the correct answer

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. 1,2 and 3
- D. None.

138. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), is headed by

- A. Prime Minister
- B. Defense Minister
- C. Home minister
- D. Defense secretary

139. Consider the following statements.

1. All Rhabdops snakes are endemic to India.
2. Rhabdops are nocturnal snake and hunts for prey underwater

Choose the correct statements

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

140. The parent organisation of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations is the

- A. Ministry of Culture
- B. Ministry of Tourism
- C. Ministry of External Affairs
- D. It is an autonomous organisation.

141. 'Technosphere', a term which recently appeared in the news, refers to all

- A. Urban regions of the developed world.
- B. Urban regions of our planet.
- C. Structures those humans have constructed in urban areas.
- D. Structures those humans have constructed to keep them alive on the planet including farms.

142. The Lokpal Act, in its present form, provides for a five-member panel to select the anti-corruption ombudsman, comprising the.

1. Prime Minister
2. Lok Sabha Speaker
3. Rajya Sabha Chairman
4. Chief Justice of India
5. Leader of the Opposition in the lower House

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- B. 2 and 5 only
- C. 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
- D. 1, 3 and 4 only

143. Consider the following statements.

1. BrahMos is a hypersonic ballistic missile
2. BrahMos is a two-stage missile, one being solid and the second one ramjet liquid propellant

Choose the correct answer:

- A. Only 1
- B. 1 and 2
- C. Both are correct
- D. None of the above

144. Recently Pinkathon was organized at Kolkata, the main theme was

- A. Women's wellness and breast cancer.
- B. Women's rights issue.
- C. Women's wellness and Lung cancer
- D. None of the above

145. At which of the following sites does one observe the evidence of practice of burying dogs with their masters?

- A. Burzahom
- B. Chirand
- C. Piklihal
- D. Gufkral

146. What is the style of script in the Indus Valley Civilization?

- A. Boustrophedon
- B. Pictographic
- C. Hieroglyphic
- D. None of the above

147. Consider the following statement with reference to NATGRID.

1. NATGRID is a grid connecting both the South and North electrical grid in order to balance the supply and demand mismatch in power between the two grids. It covers only organized sector.
2. The National Intelligence Grid or NATGRID is the integrated intelligence grid connecting databases of core security agencies of the Government of India to collect comprehensive patterns of intelligence that can be readily accessed by intelligence agencies.

Choose the correct answer:

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

148. Consider the following statements with reference to Global Wildlife Programme:

1. It is a World-Bank led partnership of 19 countries
2. It seeks to promote the conservation and sustainable development by combating trafficking in wildlife.

Choose the correct answer

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

149. Among the following who are the Agaria Community?

- A. A traditional toddy tappers community of Andhra Pradesh
- B. A traditional fishing community of Maharashtra.
- C. A traditional silk-weaving community of Karnataka
- D. A traditional salt-pan workers community of Gujarat.

150. In which State is the Buddhist site Tabo Monastery located?

- A. Arunachal Pradesh
- B. Himachal Pradesh
- C. Sikkim
- D. Uttarakhand

151. In which one of the following States has India's largest private sector sea port has been commissioned recently?

- A. Andhra Pradesh
- B. Karnataka
- C. Kerala
- D. Tamil Nadu

152. An increase in the Bank Rate generally indicates that the

- A. Market rate of interest is likely to fall
- B. Central Bank is no longer making loans to commercial banks
- C. Central Bank is following an easy money policy
- D. Central Bank is following a tight money policy

153. If Panchayats is dissolved, elections are to be held within

- A. 1 month
- B. 3 months
- C. 6 months
- D. 1 year

ANSWER KEYS

1.	C
2.	B
3.	D
4.	B
5.	C
6.	C
7.	C
8.	C
9.	C
10.	A
11.	A
12.	C
13.	A
14.	C
15.	B
16.	B
17.	D
18.	A
19.	A
20.	A
21.	A
22.	D
23.	D
24.	C
25.	D

26.	A
27.	B
28.	D
29.	C
30.	B
31.	C
32.	B
33.	D
34.	D
35.	B
36.	C
37.	D
38.	A
39.	A
40.	D
41.	A
42.	D
43.	B
44.	B
45.	A
46.	C
47.	A
48.	C
49.	B
50.	D

51.	A
52.	A
53.	B
54.	D
55.	A
56.	A
57.	A
58.	C
59.	C
60.	C
61.	C
62.	A
63.	B
64.	D
65.	A
66.	A
67.	D
68.	C
69.	B
70.	D
71.	A
72.	D
73.	B
74.	B
75.	D

76.	A
77.	D
78.	C
79.	C
80.	D
81.	B
82.	D
83.	B
84.	A
85.	B
86.	B
87.	C
88.	D
89.	A
90.	C
91.	C
92.	D
93.	B
94.	A
95.	A
96.	B
97.	D
98.	C
99.	B
100.	D

101.	B
102.	A
103.	D
104.	A
105.	C
106.	B
107.	D
108.	B
109.	C
110.	A
111.	A
112.	A
113.	B
114.	B
115.	C
116.	A
117.	B
118.	C
119.	A
120.	A
121.	D
122.	C
123.	C
124.	C
125.	A

126.	C
127.	B
128.	A
129.	C
130.	C
131.	A
132.	B
133.	C
134.	C
135.	D
136.	C
137.	C
138.	A
139.	D
140.	D
141.	D
142.	C
143.	D
144.	A
145.	A
146.	A
147.	C
148.	C
149.	D
150.	B

151.	A
152.	D
153.	C

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Paper- 1

Topic: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present significant events, personalities, issues..

1. Examine critically the various policies of British in India from mid-eighteenth century till Independence.
2. In many ways, Lord Dalhousie was the founder of modern India". Elaborate
3. Explain how the Uprising of 1857 constitutes an important watershed in the evolution of British policies towards colonial India.

Topic: Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

4. Critically analyse urban transport challenges in Indian cities and policy responses needed to address these challenges.
5. Major cities of India are becoming vulnerable to flood conditions. Discuss.
6. It is argued that the concept of marital rape is not suitable in the Indian context due to illiteracy, poverty, social customs, values, religious beliefs, and other factors. Do you agree with this view? Comment.
7. With a brief background of quality of urban life in India, introduce the objectives and strategy of the 'Smart City Programme.'

Topic: Effects of globalization on Indian society.

8. Critically examine the effects of globalization on the aged population in India
9. Discuss impact of globalization on higher education in India

Topic: Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

10. How do the Indian debates on Secularism differ from the debates in the West?
11. Growing feeling of regionalism is an important factor in the generation of demand for a separate state. Discuss.
12. Has the formation of linguistic states strengthened the cause of Indian unity?

Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location - changes in critical geographical features (including waterbodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

13. The effective management of land and water resources will drastically reduce the human miseries. Explain

Paper- 2

Topic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

1. Discuss each adjective attached to the word 'Republic' in the 'Preamble'. Are they defensible in the present circumstances?

Topic: Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

2. Why does Constitution of India provide different forms of Oaths for the President, the Ministers, the legislators and the member of the judiciary? Discuss their significance.

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.

3. In 2013, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court upheld Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which discriminates against a section of individuals in society on the basis of their sexual orientation, so is it against the essence of Article 15 of the constitution? Examine.
4. "Sections 377 reflect prominent way in which the British left their stamp upon India's criminal law, in a manner that is entirely inconsistent with a democratic, constitutional republic." Analyze.
5. 'The Supreme Court of India keeps a check on arbitrary power of the Parliament in amending the Constitution.' Discuss critically.
6. "Codifying checks and balances in respective police Acts will bring assurance against illegal orders by the political establishment to the police". Discuss.

Topic: Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

7. "A true democracy cannot exist without reflection of a majority aspirations" Comment.
8. What is Two Round Election system? Should India move towards two round first past the post system? Examine the pros and cons of such a move.

Topic: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

9. Exercise of CAG's powers in relation to the accounts of the Union and the States is derived from Article 149 of the Indian Constitution. Discuss whether audit of the Government's policy implementation could amount to overstepping its own (CAG) jurisdiction.

Topic: Development processes and the development industry- the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

10. The penetration of Self Help Groups in rural areas in promoting participation in development programmes is facing socio-cultural hurdles. Examine

Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

11. Critically evaluate the focus and performance of Centre's Swachh Bharat Mission.
12. Is policy implementation a hurdle in the path of minority progress? Critically analyse with respect to the recent Nirbhaya victim compensation.
13. Electronic cash transfer system for the welfare schemes is an ambitious project to minimize corruption, eliminate wastage and facilitate reforms Comment.

Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

14. "Prescription of generic drugs would bring down out of pocket expenditure" Evaluate? What other steps need to be taken in order to bring down out of pocket expenditure

Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

15. Artificial Intelligence can become an effective tool for good governance. Discuss.
16. "RTI Act needs to be protected against attempts to dilute it." Discuss it in the backdrop of proposed amendment pertained to Rule 12 of the RTI

Topic: Role of civil services in a democracy.

17. "Traditional bureaucratic structure and culture have hampered the process of socio-economic development in India." Comment.

Topic: India and its neighborhood- relations.

18. "While it is of great value that India has Japan's support for building the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train, there are multiple challenges that need to be overcome." Discuss.
19. Discuss the major irritant in Indo-China relations and highlight the latest move to overcome these.
20. What do you understand by "The String of Pearls"? How does it impact India? Briefly outline the steps taken by India to counter this.

Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

21. Is Chinese plan of "BRICS PLUS" a major challenge to India? Discuss
22. "India and China must address bilateral issues in a sustainable way, pursuing the BRICS spirit" Discuss
23. "Asia Africa Growth Corridor will help in developing institutional mechanisms and models for connecting people, think tanks and businesses" Discuss.
24. Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in UN Security Council

Paper- 3**Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.**

1. Define Smart City? Do you think India's Smart City mission initiative will be successful? Critically comment
2. What are the various Export control regimes? What does India stand to gain from the membership of these regimes?
3. What is the meaning of the term 'tax expenditure'? Taking housing sector as an example, discuss how it influences the budgetary policies of the government.

Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

4. "Parts of Asia risk becoming old before becoming rich." Comment

Topic: Government Budgeting.

5. Women empowerment in India needs gender budgeting. What are the requirements and status of gender budgeting in the Indian context?
6. What are the reasons for introduction of Fiscal responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) act, 2003? Discuss critically its salient features and their effectiveness.

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. How can Digital India programme help farmers to improve farm productivity and income? What steps has the government taken in this regard?
8. What is water-use efficiency? Describe the role of micro-irrigation in increasing the water-use efficiency

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; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

9. Discuss the practical solutions that can plug loopholes in Public Distribution System
10. Subsidies are politicians delight and economists nightmare- discuss the subsidy regime of India in the context of the statement.

Topic: Land reforms in India.

11. Discuss the role of land reforms in agricultural development. Identify the factors that were responsible for the success of land reforms in India.

Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

12. "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: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.

13. Write a note on India's green energy corridor to alleviate the problems of conventional energy.
14. Enumerate the problems and prospects of inland water transport in India.
15. Analyse the pros and cons of privatization of the railway operations? Is it a progressive move to shift from the Swiss Model

Topic: Investment models.

16. Adaptation of PPP model for infrastructure development of the country has not been free from criticism. Critically discuss the pros and cons of the model.

Topic: Science and Technology - developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

17. Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee recently approved the GM mustard seeds for commercial production. In light of this analyze the various issues raised by the opponents of GM crops and DO you think passing of Biotechnology Regulator Bill, 2008 would take care of the issues raised by the opponents?
18. Many food items contain “trans fats”. What do you understand by this term? Which Indian food items contain “trans fat”? What are the implications of trans fats on human health?
19. What do you mean by In Vitro gametogenesis technique (IVG)? How is it different from In vitro fertilization technique and critically analyze various issues associated with IVG technique?

Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

20. Discuss India's achievements in the field of Space Science and Technology. How the application of this technology has helped India in its socio-economic development?

Topic: Disaster and disaster management.

21. Rehabilitation of human settlements is one of the important environmental impacts which always attracts controversy while planning major projects. Discuss the measures suggested for mitigation of this impact while proposing major developmental projects.
22. The frequency of urban floods due to high intensity rainfall is increasing over the years. Discussing the reasons for urban floods. highlight the mechanisms for preparedness to reduce the risk during such events.

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.

23. Use of Internet and social media by non-state actors for subversive activities is a major concern. How have these have misused in the recent past? Suggest effective guidelines to curb the above threat.
24. Considering the threats cyberspace poses for the country, India needs a “Digital Armed Force” to prevent crimes. Critically evaluate the National Cyber Security Policy, 2013 outlining the challenges perceived in its effective implementation. (Mains 2015).

Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

25. “Terrorism is emerging as a competitive industry over the last few decades.” Analyse the above statement.

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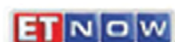


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