BYJU'S The Learning App | IAS

SEPTEMBER - 2018

UPSC MONTHLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Section 377

Supreme Court decriminalizes homosexuality

Maldives Elections

Time to reset ties

2008 Economic crisis and its dimensions

Why, what and How of the economic calamity

Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)

Every citizen's right to Healthcare.

Doorstep Delivery of public services in Delhi

Governance at doorstep

RESULTS

Incredible results in IAS 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

We broke our past record in IAS 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

We did it again in IAS 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

And we've done it yet again in 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

And we've done it yet again in IAS 2017

5 Ranks in Top 10 | **34 Ranks** in Top 100 | **236 Ranks** In The Final List

Rank 3
Sachin Gupta

Rank 6
Koya sree Harsha

Rank 8
Anubhav Singh

Rank 9
Saumya Sharma

Rank 10
Abhishek Surana

Ashima Mittal
Rank-12

Abhijeet Sinha
Rank-19

Varjeet Walia
Rank-21

Keerthi Vasan V
Rank-29

Utsav Gautam
Rank-33

Gaurav Kumar
Rank-34

Abhilash Baranwal
Rank-44

Vikramaditya Singh Malik
Rank-48

Vishal Mishra
Rank-49

Sambit Mishra
Rank-51

Bodke Digvijay Govind
Rank-54

Akshat Kaushal
Rank-55

Jagdish Chelani
Rank-57

Hirani Adityavikram
Rank-60

Swapneel Paul
Rank-64

Jyoti Sharma
Rank-75

Pushp Lata
Rank-80

Amol Srivastava
Rank-83

Prateek Jain
Rank-86

Amilineni Bhargav Teja
Rank-88

Sangh Priy
Rank-92

Rahul Shinde
Rank-95

Kathawate Mayur Ashok
Rank-96

Vaibhava Srivastava
Rank-98

Videh Khare
Rank-99

Plash Bansal
Rank-112

Shilpa Singh
Rank-116

Deepanshu Khurana
Rank-120

Saurabh Sabhlok
Rank-124

Abhimanyu Manglik
Rank-128

Akash Bansal
Rank-130

Abinash Kumar
Rank-139

Sameer Saurabh
Rank-142

Jyeshtha Maitrei
Rank-156

Aaditya Mishra
Rank-158

Ram Prakash
Rank-162

Mainak Ghosh
Rank-183

Archit Virendra Chandak
Rank-184

Ankit Yadav
Rank-191

Saurabh Gupta
Rank-192

Kritika Jain
Rank-197

Nahar Pranay Prakash
Rank-199

Siddhant Jain
Rank-201

Shubham Agarwal
Rank-202

Nikita Khattar
Rank-208

Kruti M Patel
Rank-218

Smit Lodha
Rank-219

Deepesh Kedia
Rank-221

Ankit Jain
Rank-222

Saurabh Baranwal
Rank-235

Rajat R Chaturvedi
Rank-237

Harsh Singh
Rank-244

Ghuge Rohan Bapurao
Rank-249

Bharat Mittal
Rank-256

Dinesh Kumar Yadav
Rank-257

Govind Mohan
Rank-260

Shanu Dimri
Rank-270

Shiv Narayan Sharma
Rank-278

Sanjay Kumar
Rank-279

Nikhil Singh
Rank-280

Tuhin Sinha
Rank-281

Vijaypal Bishnoi
Rank-290

Shubhank Mishra
Rank-291

Shakti Mohan Avasthy
Rank-296

Lavanya Gupta
Rank-298

Jagtap Gagdish Shankar
Rank-304

Chetan Sharma
Rank-305

Amandeep Dhanoa
Rank-311

Budumajji Satya Prasad
Rank-313

Aman Bishla
Rank-314

Mohd Nooh Siddiqui
Rank-326

Apurv Chauhan
Rank-328

CONTENT

CHAPTER **PAGE**

1. POLITY **07**

- Aadhaar verdict by Supreme Court
    - The poor are left to themselves
- Chief Justice of India - Ranjan Gogoi to be appointed
- Chief Election Commissioner says 'Democracy under threat from black money, fake news'
- Duty to defend in courts
- Ethics Committee Lok Sabha
- Google to help EC track online political ads
- Niti Aayog (NA) and its relevance
    - Niti Aayog is not relevant
    - What should Niti Aayog look into?
- Police Arrests should follow due Process
- Rajiv Gandhi assassination case
    - Should the convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi case be released?- Yes
    - No
    - What should be done?
- Salaries of Legislators Survey
- Role of the mosque in Islam
- No other book can trump the Indian Constitution
- For liberty's sake

2. ECONOMY **29**

- 2008 Economic crisis and its dimensions
- Aapoorti app
- Agmark
- Argentina Economic Turmoil
- Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna
- Bogibeel Bridge- India longest road-rail bridge
- Capital Structure
- Chardham Highway Project
- Cocoa butter important source of vitamin D
- Coffee- Technology Initiatives
- Committee on Stressed Power Projects
- Credit Suisse Report
- Expense Ratio for MF schemes cut down by SEBI
- Financial Inclusion Index
- 'Future of Jobs' Report- World Economic Forum (WEF)
- Global Media Compact
- Human Capital Rankings
- Human Development Index (HDI)
- India International Convention and Expo Centre
- Indian Ports Association appoints Managed Service Provider
- India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)

- Izmir International Tradeshow
- Jan Dhan Darshak
- Jhum Cultivation
- Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF)
- Merger of Dena Bank, Vijaya Bank and Bank of Baroda
- Move Global Mobility Summit
- NRI Bonds to rescue the rupee
- Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA)
- Painted rails set to counter corrosion
- Pakyong Airport
- Psbloansin59minutes.com
- Public Credit Registry
- Raghuram Rajan says Small loans could turn bad
- Rubber
    - Rubber Board
    - National Rubber Policy (NRP)
- Sadarmatt anicut and and Pedda Cheruvu get Heritage tag
- SEBI new norms for FPIs
- Smart Trains
- Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)
- Unemployment among educated youth at 16%
- West Bengal where infrastructure is crumbling
- Government announces measures to stabilize rupee
- Centre hikes import duty on select goods
- Upping the ante

3. INTERNATIONAL RELATION **71**

- Ahvaz
- Boundary Working Group (BWG)
- Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)
    - Nerve Agents
- Doklam final report lauds government
- Exercise KAKADU
- e-VBAB (e-VidyaBharati and e-AarogyaBharati)
- G4
- Haqqani's death
- IOWave18
- KAZIND
- Logistics agreement between India and Russia
- Maldives Elections
- MiG-21s to be gifted to Russia by India
- MILEX
- Rapid Trident Military Exercises
- SLINEX
- United Nations Relief and Works Agency
- Yudh Abhyas 2018
- Routes to Afghanistan: on 2+2 talks
- Mauritius tops India's FDI charts again
- Trade talks stuck as U.S. presses oil, aircraft sales to India
- Pak. duplicity key hurdle in fight against terror: Sushma
- MoU between NITI Aayog, and Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation (MEDRF)

- India and Morocco sign Air Services Agreement
- Seeking a managed exit

4. SOCIAL ISSUES **89**

- Adultery is no more a crime says Supreme Court
- Andh
- International Women Entrepreneurs Summit
- Krishna Kutir
- Lepchas
- Live-in partners can adopt now
- Manual Scavenging
- Mobilize Your City (MYC)
- Prison of patriarchy
- Portals to strengthen Women Safety
- Sabarimala Verdict
- Section 377
    - Section 377 verdict retains bestiality as crime
- Section 498A: SC says welfare committees not needed in dowry cases
- Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits (SAECK)
- Solar Mamas (Rural women solar engineers)
- Solid waste management policy- SC imposes costs on errant States, UT
- Tiwa (Lalung)
- Replace 'Dalit' with 'SC', I&B Min Advisory Tells
- UN Report: A child under 15 dies every 5 seconds around the world
- 'Vantangiya' community
- Triple talaq is criminal offence

5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY **110**

- Apsara – U Reactor
- BUFFALO Survey
- Cyborg Cockroach
- Focusing Optics X-ray Solar Imager, or FOXSI
- Gaganyaan Mission
- Hope Mars Mission/ Emirates Mars Mission
- International Center for Transformative AI (ICTAI)
- MINERVA-II1
- Robat
- UTRAQ
- XMM-Newton
- Zoological Society of London honor for scientist

6. SECURITY AND DEFENSE **117**

- Akash Upgraded version
- Aviaindra Exercise
- 'Bharat Ke Veer' portal
- Cattle smuggling on the border
- Cyber University in Maharashtra
- FTC-2000G
- Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
- Money laundering- India and Cyprus enter into agreement

- Offset Policy in Defence
- Parakram Parv
- Prahaar Missile
- VC 11184

7. ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY **125**

- Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) accused of being lax in enforcement of rules
- Aravallis Ecological damage
- Bangkok Climate Change Conference
- Black Spotted Turtles/ Geoclemys Hamiltonii
- Bonnethead Shark / Shovel Head
- Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH)
- Climate change affecting the flora and fauna of the high Himalayas
- Colobopsis Explodens
- Coral Ecosystems
- Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project
- Eight avian species declared "extinct" in new study
- Fluoride contamination
- Indian Roofed Turtle (Pangshura Tecta)
- International Whaling Commission
- Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUSHR)
- Man-Animal conflict Costs
- Nahargarh Biological Park
- Plogging
- Pondicherry shark/Long nosed shark
- Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary/ Kulik Bird Sanctuary
- RE-INVEST
- River pollution: NGT directs States to act
- Royle's Pika / Himalayan Mouse Hare
- Satkosia Tiger Reserve
- Snow Leopard
- Soil degradation
- Shoot-at-sight order for 'man-eater' tiger: SC
- Stubble Burning
- TX2 Programme
- WAYU (Wind Augmentation Purifying Unit)
- Action on climate change could add $26 trillion to world economy
- 59 plant species in IUCN threat categories
- Environment Ministry report on e-waste

8. HEALTH ISSUES **148**

- Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)
- Charter of Patients' Rights- Draft
- Cyclone-30
- Global Status Report on Alcohol- WHO
- IMA moots ethics code overhaul
- India State-level Disease Burden Initiative report
- National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) study on AIDS
- Rashtriya Poshan Maah (National Nutrition Month)
- State panels to track hip implant patients
- WHO says 34% Indians not active enough

- SC questions 'leprosy-free' tag for India
- Call for policy, action in diabetes prevention, management

9. EDUCATION **162**
- Higher education in India
- World Summit on Accreditation (WOSA)
- 52nd International Literacy Day

10. ART AND CULTURE **165**
- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 Amendments
- Bhaona
- Brihadisvara Temple
- Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha
- Gatka
- Hindi Divas
- Kamangari Bhint Chitro /Wall Paintings
- Kanthasth
- Mehtab Bagh
- Mongmong
- Muziris
- Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Dargah in Ajmer
- Sri Jagannatha Swamy temple
- Vaishnava Jana To

11. GOVERNANCE **173**
- All India Pension Adalat
- Audits to track construction workers' benefits
- Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics (CEDA)
- Digi VAARTA
- Doorstep Delivery of public services by AAP in Delhi
- ISRO spy scandal case- Nambi Narayanan
- Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention
- National Digital Communications Policy-2018
- National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA)
- Nutrition guidelines approved by Niti Aayog
    - Evidence Based Policy Making (EBPM)
- Right to be forgotten
- Smart Village / Smart Gram
- Locate Public Toilets on Google Maps

12. DISASTER MANAGMENT **185**
- Accidental deaths: 25% of all in India are weather-related
- Kolkata launches first flood forecast system
- Typhoon Jebi
- Understanding older people's vulnerabilities

13. GEOGRAPHY **189**
- Celestial misfit: Pluto a planet or not?
- Mount Paektu/ Baekdu Mountain

14. HISTORY **191**
- Marathwada Liberation Day/ Hyderabad Liberation Day
- Tileswari Barua

15. MISCELLANEOUS **193**
- Amitava Roy Committee on Jail reforms
- Bleed Switch
- EyeROV TUNA
- Oont Kadal
- Project kalpavriksha
- Swayangsiddha
- India's first woman IAS officer dead
- Police forces in 6 UTs merged
- 'Fat' traces confirm Dickinsonia to be world's earliest animals

16. PRACTICE QUESTIONS **197**

17. ANSWER KEY **215**

18. MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS **218**

1. POLITY

Aadhaar verdict by Supreme Court

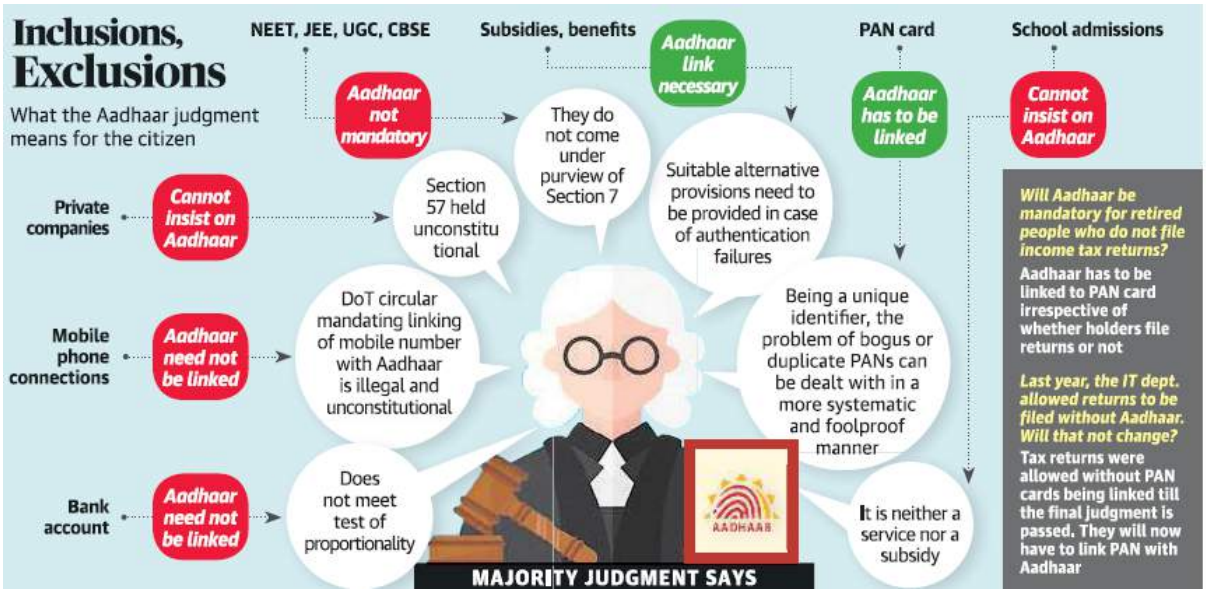
Context

- The Supreme Court declared the Centre's flagship Aadhaar scheme as constitutionally valid but ruled that the biometric identity card is not mandatory for bank accounts, mobile connections or school admissions.

Facts

- The Aadhaar case was the "second longest" one in terms of days of hearing after the historic Kesavananda Bharati case of 1973.

Details



Exclusions- Who cannot ask for Aadhar details?

- Educational institutes cannot seek Aadhaar during admissions in schools saying consent of parents is essential. It also said UGC, NEET, CBSE cannot ask for Aadhaar.
- The court insulated children from the Aadhaar regime.
- The card was not necessary for children aged between 6 and 14 under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as right to education was a fundamental right.
- Pvt Companies- It quashed Section 57 of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016 that permitted private entities like telecom companies or other corporates to avail of the biometric Aadhaar data.
- SIM card can be provided without providing your Aadhaar number. The government, though, is free to bring about a law that mandates Aadhaar for obtaining a SIM card.
- Banks and other financial institutions cannot seek Aadhaar data. This means no bank can threaten to freeze your account if you do not furnish your Aadhaar number.

Inclusions- Where is Aadhar required?

- The court has upheld Section 7 of the Aadhaar Act which stated Aadhar is mandatory for any government scheme that draws out of the consolidated fund of India.
    - This means that if you want to avail benefits such as ration, LPG subsidy, MGNREGA, you have to furnish your Aadhaar number or your Aadhaar enrollment ID.
    - Justice Sikri said technology had become a vital tool for ensuring good governance in a social welfare state.
    - Schemes such as the PDS, scholarships, midday meals and LPG subsidies involve a huge amount of money, and "foolproof" Aadhaar helped welfare reach the poor.
    - Aadhaar was meant to help the benefits reach the marginalised sections of society, it said the scheme takes into account the dignity of people not only from personal but from the community point of view as well and served the much bigger public interest.
    - Aadhaar gives dignity to the marginalised. Dignity to the marginalised outweighs privacy.
- In the past three years, it has saved the government more than Rs 90,000 crore.
    - The World Bank's Development Report on Digital Dividends 2016 estimated that the use of Aadhaar in all the Centre's benefit and welfare schemes could save the government over US $11 billion annually by reducing leakage, and through efficiency-related gains.
- The court has also made it clear that an individual has to furnish their Aadhaar number or the enrollment ID while filing Income Tax returns.
    - It has also made Aadhaar-PAN card linking mandatory as well as the requirement of Aadhaar when applying for PAN card. This is an indirect link to banks, where PAN card number is mandatory. It is this part that, in a way, makes it mandatory for you to obtain an Aadhaar number.

What is a Money Bill?

- A Bill is said to be a Money Bill if it only contains provisions related to
    a. taxation,
    b. borrowing of money by the government,
    c. expenditure from or receipt to the Consolidated Fund of India. Bills that only contain provisions that are incidental to these matters would also be regarded as Money Bills.
- A Money Bill may only be introduced in Lok Sabha. This is done so on the recommendation of the President.
- It must be passed in Lok Sabha by a simple majority of all members present and voting. Following this, it may be sent to the Rajya Sabha for its recommendations, which Lok Sabha may reject if it chooses to.
- If such recommendations are not given within 14 days, it will deemed to be passed by Parliament.

What is a Financial Bill?

- A Bill that contains some provisions related to taxation and expenditure, and additionally contains provisions related to any other matter is called a Financial Bill. Therefore, if a Bill merely involves expenditure by the government, and addresses other issues, it will be a financial bill.
- A Financial Bill may only be introduced in Lok Sabha, on the recommendation of the President. The Bill must be passed by both Houses of Parliament, after the President has recommended that it be taken up for consideration in each House.
- It is important to note that the Rajya Sabha has no power to reject or amend a Money Bill. However, a Financial Bill must be passed by both Houses of Parliament.
- The Speaker certifies a Bill as a Money Bill, and the Speaker's decision is final.

On Money Bill

- Under the Constitution, a Money Bill must have only matters relating to finance and taxation. Because this also involves other things it means it was supposed to have been passed by Ordinary law where Rajya Sabha had equal Powers.
- Justice D Y Chandrachud delivered a dissenting judgment in which he ruled the Aadhaar Act should not have been passed as Money Bill as it amounts to a fraud on the Constitution and is liable to be struck down.
    - Justice Chandrachud said it was now impossible to live in India without Aadhaar and it was violative of Article 14 and if it got seeded with every database, there was a chance of infringement of right to privacy.
    - The judgment is right as it holds that the decision of the Speaker to certify a bill as a money is subject to judicial review
- However, the majority verdict by justices A K Sikri, Ashok Bhushan and A M Khanwilkar besides the CJI upheld the passage of the Aadhaar Bill as a Money Bill by the Lok Sabha.
    - welfare measures sought to be extended to the marginalized sections, a collective reading would show that the "purpose is to expand the coverage of all kinds of aid, support, grant, advantage, relief provisions, facility, utility or assistance which may be extended with the support of the Consolidated Fund of India with the objective of targeted delivery".
    - Upholding the passage of the Aadhaar Act as a Money Bill, the Supreme Court said neither were individuals profiled nor their movements traced when Aadhaar was used to avail government benefits under Section 7 of the Aadhaar Act of 2016.
    - The statute only sought "minimal" biometric information, and this did not amount to invasion of privacy.
- Aadhaar means unique and it is better to be unique than being best. Because, being the best makes you the number one, but being unique makes you the only one

<u>The issue of contention: Passing the Aadhar as a Money Bill:</u>

- From this issue, one thing that has emerged is the question of finality of the Speaker's decision on what amounts to a Money Bill under Article 110(3) of the Constitution.
- There are two competing views that emerge here. These are:
  1) An Expansionist View
  2) A Contractionist View
    - The Expansionist view, while acknowledging the high constitutional status of the Speaker, suggests that any bill which involves recourse to Consolidated Fund of India is a Money Bill, and the charge levelled is that the finality of the Speaker's decision is virtually unchallengeable.
    - The Contractionist view suggests that just like all constitutional functionaries, the Speaker is bound to exercise the discretion reasonably;
    - The fact that increasingly one observes that a large number of bills are being tagged as Money Bills sets a dangerous precedent because it removes the rationale for bicameral legislatures.
    - From a critical standpoint, Justice Chandrachud fully dissents and holds the law invalid as a "fraud on the Constitution", asserting that it is a colourable exercise of constitutional power.
    - Importantly, Justice Chandrachud holds that the decision to give the Aadhaar Bill the status of a Money Bill violates the principle of bicameralism and an aspect of federalism. It is important to note that the principle of bicameralism is declared as a part of the basic structure of the Constitution of India.

People excluded from Aadhar

- The problem of exclusion faced by the elderly, the very young, the disabled and several others during the authentication process.
- It was accurate 99.76% times but had a failure of 0.232%
- So the remedy was to plug the loopholes rather than axe Aadhaar.
- The court further directed the government and the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to bring in regulations to prevent rightfully entitled people from being denied benefits.

On Privacy

- Aadhaar Act does not violate an individual's right to privacy
- Data collection by Aadhaar is minimal and it is serving a much larger public interest
- But they said robust data protection regime has to be brought in place as early as possible
- It was also held that profiling was not possible and there were inbuilt safeguards against it

What else did Supreme Court strike down?

- Section 33(1) allows disclosure of information, including identity and authentication records, if ordered by a court not inferior to that of District Judge.
    - Reading down this sub-section, the SC has said individuals should be given the opportunity of hearing.
    - It bestows the right to be heard before his Aadhaar data is accessed by the court of a District Judge.
- The Supreme Court struck down Section 33(2), which allowed the disclosure of Aadhaar information for national security reasons on the orders of an officer not below a Joint Secretary.
    - It held that an officer above the Joint Secretary rank should first consult with a judicial officer, possibly a High Court judge, and both should decide whether information need to be disclosed in the national interest
- The judgment has struck down Section 47 of the Act, which stated that criminal complaints for data breach can be filed only by UIDAI.
    - The exclusion of individuals from filing complaints was held to be arbitrary

Challenges

- The Constitution Bench was unanimous in declaring that seeding of Aadhaar with mobile phone SIM cards was unconstitutional.
- But with respect to deletion of data the majority opinion is silent, Justice J. Chandrachud's direction to mobile companies to delete biometric data will open a Pandora 's Box.
- "No use of the said information or details shall be made by TSPs or any agency or person or their behalf," Justice Chandrachud ordered.

The poor are left to themselves

Background

- The entire aim behind launching this programme is the 'inclusion' of the deserving persons who need to get benefits.
- When it is serving much larger purpose by reaching hundreds of millions of deserving persons, it cannot be crucified on the unproven plea of exclusion of some.

Concerns

- Many people are denied rations from the Public Distribution System shops for failing to have Aadhaar-based biometric authentication because their ration card could not be linked with Aadhaar.
- To get benefits under the PDS, biometric authorization is required and this calls for technological necessities which villages lack: uninterrupted power supply, a functioning PoS machine, adequate mobile and Internet connectivity and ensuring that data repository servers are running smoothly.
- Aadhaar-enabled point of sales (PoS) machine would not authenticate their biometrics they will have to go without food items and die in hunger.
- The number of people excluded from getting Aadhaar may be small (as a percentage of the population), but they happen to be the most vulnerable — bed-ridden old persons, victims of accidents, people with visual disabilities, etc.

Is Aadhar inclusive is Questionable

- Each government programme has its own eligibility criterion.
- In the Public Distribution System (PDS), there are State-specific inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- In some States, if you have a government job or live in a concrete/pucca home, you cannot get a PDS ration card — even if you have an Aadhaar card.
- Conversely, if you lived in a mud hut or were an Adivasi, you would get a PDS ration card. After the coming of Aadhaar, on top of satisfying the State eligibility criteria, you need to procure and link your Aadhaar number in order to continue to remain eligible for your PDS ration card.
- Before Aadhaar was made mandatory, it was neither necessary (you could get subsidised PDS grain without Aadhaar)

Ghost accounts real or fabricated?

- There was no reliable evidence on the scale of this problem ("identity fraud").
- Recent independent surveys and government data are beginning to suggest that it wasn't the main form of corruption. Linking Aadhaar cards with the PDS in Odisha led to the discovery of 0.3% duplicates.

The Scope for Corruption: Does it still persist?

Quantity fraud continues with Aadhaar-based biometric authentication.

What is Quantity fraud? It is a type of fraud wherein a beneficiary is sold less than his/her entitlement, but signs off on the full amount.

In conclusion, critics allege that those who benefit from these programmes and who understand why Aadhaar cannot improve inclusion do not have a voice in the media or policy-making.

Chief Justice of India - Ranjan Gogoi to be appointed

Context

- President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed Justice Ranjan Gogoi as the next Chief Justice of India, law ministry confirmed. Taking the baton from CJI Dipak Misra, Justice Gogoi will assume office on October 3, 2018, as the 46th CJI, tenure ending in November 2019.

Details

- Chief Justice Misra has followed convention by recommending the next senior most Supreme Court judge, Justice Gogoi, as his successor.
- By convention, the outgoing Chief Justice of India selects the most senior then-sitting Supreme Court judge.
- This convention on appointment of the CJI comes from historical practice, and has been affirmed by the Supreme Court in the Second Judges Case in 1993, in which it was held by the majority that:
    - Appointment to the office of the Chief Justice of India should be of the senior-most Judge of the Supreme Court considered fit to hold the office.

Seniority at the apex court is determined not by age, but by:

- The date a judge was appointed to the Supreme Court.
- If two judges are elevated to the Supreme Court on the same day,
    - The one who was sworn in first as a judge would trump another;
    - If both were sworn in as judges on the same day, the one with more years of high court service would 'win' in the seniority stakes;
    - An appointment from the bench would 'trump' in seniority an appointee from the bar.

The seniority convention tells us who should become the next CJI, but how this is to be done is laid out in the Memorandum of Procedure (MOP) between the government and judiciary.

The steps to be followed are:

- The Union of Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs will seek the recommendation of the outgoing CJI as to who should be the next CUI. This is to be sought at "the appropriate time", ie, near to the retirement date of the outgoing CJI.
- The CJI should recommend the "senior-most judge of the Supreme Court considered fit to hold the office". However, if there are any doubts as to the fitness of the senior-most judge as per convention, the CJI needs to consult the Collegium to decide if a different judge needs to be recommended.
    - It is not entirely clear what fitness means in this context, though during the proceedings of the NJAC case, Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi and the bench opined that this was only a question of physical or mental fitness.
    - If such issues do come up, again, it is not the CJI alone who gets to consider whether a judge is fit or not, but the Collegium of the CJI and the four next senior-most judges.
- After receipt of the CJI's recommendation, the law minister will forward the recommendation to the prime minister, who then advises the President as to this recommendation.

Does the Government have Say in appointment?

- Despite the involvement of the law minister and the prime minister, the government actually gets no say in the appointment of the CJI. This is best illustrated by comparing the provisions of the MOP on appointment of the CJI as against appointment of judges to the Supreme Court.
- When it comes to appointing judges to the Supreme Court, the government can send recommendations of the Collegium back to them for reconsideration — and if the Collegium reiterates those names, the government cannot object any further. This process is described in the MOP in detail.
- However, no such process exists for the appointment of the CJI, meaning the MOP does not envisage any possibility of the government disagreeing with the recommendation of the CJI.

Background

- There have been 45 Chief Justices of India (including the incumbent CJI Dipak Misra) since the establishment of the Supreme Court in 1950, and the seniority convention has been followed all but twice in that time. Both these took place in situations where the Executive (in particular PM Indira Gandhi) wished to supersede those who would have been appointed under the seniority convention.
- Justice Ray was fourth in terms of seniority when CJI SM Sikri retired on 25 April 1973, behind Justice JM Shelat, KS Hegde and AN Grover, despite which he was appointed as the next CJI.
- When Indira Gandhi and her government bypassed the seniority convention in the 1970s, the primacy of the judiciary in such matters was not judicially enshrined. Since then, Second and Third Judges Cases (1993 and 1998) and the NJAC case (2015), the judiciary's role has been clarified, and the government cannot gainsay them.

Chief Election Commissioner says 'Democracy under threat from black money, fake news'

Key Points:

- While addressing a symposium, the CEC has said that with the rise of fake news, data theft, data harvesting, profiling, targeted communication etc., democracy in the world is facing a very potent threat.
- The CEC said that the media should adopt some international practices, including regular columns that highlight the fake news stories of the week.
- He also spoke about 'state funding of elections' and observed that it was not an option at present, as the current law was inadequate to counter black money used in elections.
- He emphasised the need to update technology to harmonise the electoral roll and avoid duplicity and the need for an automated technology that can simultaneously update the electoral roll as births and deaths take place.
- According to a former CEC present on the occasion, the 'Democracy Index', which is produced by the United Kingdom-based Economic Intelligence Unit, had highlighted the same issues with regard to India that the Election Commission had been highlighting — criminalisation of politics and money power.

About Democracy Index:

- The Democracy Index is an index compiled by the UK-based company the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) that intends to measure the state of democracy in 167 countries.
- The index was first produced in 2006 and is based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories measuring pluralism, civil liberties and political culture.
- It categorises countries as one of four regime types: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.
- India has been placed under the category of flawed democracies.

Duty to defend in courts

Context

- The Rewari and Kosli Bar Associations in Haryana have passed resolutions that none of their members (advocates) will defend the accused in the recent case of gang-rape of a teenage girl from Rewari district.
- In a resolution, the bar association said they in solidarity with the family members of the victim and nobody from the association would fight the case for the accused.
- However this resolution is wholly illegal, and goes against the decision of the Supreme Court

Supreme Court in A.S. Mohammed Rafi v. State of Tamil Nadu (2010)

- The SC declared null and void a resolution of the Coimbatore Bar Association that none of its members will defend policemen who had allegedly assaulted some lawyers.
- Several Bar Associations in India also have passed resolutions similar resolutions that their members would not defend persons accused of heinous crimes.
- The Supreme Court declared all such resolutions to be wholly illegal, against all traditions of the Bar, and against professional ethics.
- The court observed, "Every person, however wicked, depraved, vile, degenerate, perverted, loathsome, execrable, vicious or repulsive he may be regarded by society has a right to be defended in a court of law, and correspondingly it is the duty of the lawyer to defend him."

Lessons from English Diaries

- When revolutionary writer Thomas Paine was jailed and tried for treason in England in 1792 for his famous pamphlet The Rights of Man, in defence of the French Revolution, the lawyer Thomas Erskine was briefed to defend him.
- Erskine was then Attorney General of the Prince of Wales, and he was warned that if he accepted the brief he would be dismissed from office.
- Undeterred, he accepted the brief, and was promptly dismissed. His immortal words in this connection stand out as a shining light even today: "From the moment that any advocate can be permitted to say that he will or will not stand between the Crown and the subject arraigned in Court where he daily sits to practice, from that moment the liberties of England are at an end. If the advocate refuses to defend from what he may think of the charge, or of the defence, he assumes the character of the judge, and in proportion to his rank and reputation puts the heavy influence of perhaps a mistaken opinion into the scale of justice against the accused, in whose favour the principles of law make all assumptions."

Examples from Past

- Indian lawyers have defended the revolutionaries of Bengal during British rule, the Indian communists charged of waging war against the British King in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the Razakars of Hyderabad, Sheikh Abdullah, the Indian National Army accused, the assassins of Mahatma Gandhi and Indira Gandhi, and in recent times Binayak Sen and Ajmal Kasab.

Conclusion

- No Indian lawyer of repute has shirked his duty to defend claiming that it would make him unpopular or that it was personally dangerous for him to do so.
- The right-minded lawyers of Rewari and Kosli should defy the resolutions of their Bar Associations.

Ethics Committee Lok Sabha

- Formulate a Code of Conduct for members and suggest amendments to it from time to time.
- To oversee the moral and ethical conduct of the Members
- To examine the cases referred to it with reference to ethical and other misconduct of the Members
- The committee can also initiate suo motu investigation into matters related to unethical conduct of a member and make recommendations.

Background

- Rajya Sabha was the first among the two Houses to form an ethics committee, with a full standing committee status, on 30th May, 1997.

- Lok Sabha, in contrast, formed an ad hoc ethics panel in 2000 and has been operating as one until August 2015 when it was given a permanent standing committee status.
- The ethics committee in the Lok Sabha has 15 members, while the Rajya Sabha has 10 members

Context

- Senior BJP leader L K Advani has been renominated as the chairman of the Ethics Committee of the Lok Sabha by Speaker Sumitra Mahajan.

Google to help EC track online political ads

Context

- Google which controls the lion's share of the digital advertising market, will be helping the Election Commission (EC) keep tabs on online political advertising.

Details

- The tech giant will develop a mechanism that will not only ensure pre-certification of political advertisements but also enable it to share with the authority, details about the expenditure incurred on its platforms.
- The company would keep track of political advertisements and ensure that they are pre-certified by the EC's Media Certification and Monitoring Committees.
- This would entail Google asking prospective clients, whenever an order is placed, whether they have been pre-certified.
- The Commission is the nodal body for pre-certification of advertisements of a political nature, released by either an individual or an organisation.
- The Commission would also ask the candidates to declare their official social media accounts

Significance

- Google has assured the committee that it would set up a mechanism for sharing information on the cost of the political advertisements. This would be of use to Returning Officers when it comes to calculating the election expenditure of individual candidates.

Facebook tools

- The EC's committee had also held meetings with Facebook, which has also agreed to develop tools for removing any content pertaining to election matters during the 48-hour period when the 'prohibition protocol' is in place.
- It is working on ways to check fake news and share details of expenditure on poll-related advertisements.
- During the Karnataka Assembly polls, Facebook tied up with the Indian fact-checking agency, Boom Live, which confirmed over 50 cases of "fake news."

Niti Aayog (NA) and its relevance

- NITI Aayog was formed to bring fresh ideas to the government. Its first mandate is to act as a think tank.
- It can be visualised as a funnel through which new and innovative ideas come from all possible sources — industry, academia, civil society or foreign specialists — and flow into the government system for implementation.

- Regular brainstorming sessions with stakeholders from various industries and sectors are conducted regularly.
- Initiatives like Ayushmaan Bharat, artificial intelligence and water conservation measures, and the draft bill to establish the National Medical Commission to replace the Medical Council of India have all been conceptualised in NITI Aayog, and are being taken forward by the respective Ministries.

Its role in Coordination among departments

- India still has the largest number of malnourished children in the world. In order to reduce this number vastly, it requires a huge degree of convergence across a number of Ministries, and between Central and State governments.
- NITI Aayog is best placed to achieve this convergence and push the agenda forward.

It espouses accountability

- NITI Aayog is also bringing about a greater level of accountability in the system.
- Earlier Five-Year Plans were mostly evaluated long after the plan period had ended. Hence, there was no real accountability.
- But, NITI Aayog has established a Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office which collects data on the performance of various Ministries on a real-time basis.
    - The data are then used at the highest policymaking levels to establish accountability and improve performance.
    - This performance- and outcome-based real-time monitoring and evaluation of government work can have a significant impact on improving the efficiency of governance.

Competitive Federalism

- Using performance data NA comes up with performance-based rankings of States across various verticals to foster a spirit of competitive federalism. That is another big mandate of NITI Aayog.
- It identifies the best practices in different States in various sectors and then tries to replicate them in other States.
- It also plays an important role of being the States' representative in Delhi, and facilitates direct interactions with the line ministries, which can address issues in a relatively shorter time.

With its current mandate that is spread across a range of sectors and activities, and with its unique and vibrant work culture, NITI Aayog remains an integral and relevant component of the government's plans to put in place an efficient, transparent, innovative and accountable governance system in the country.

Niti Aayog is not relevant

- Planning commission was the backbone of the socialist economy under the Nehruvian Vision to increase the hold of the state in the market dominated society to bring about inclusivity and equitable path of economic development in India
- But the erstwhile Planning Commission had been on the decline since 1991, much before the final blow was delivered to it in 2014
- The rise of neoliberalism, the decline of erstwhile socialist regimes worldwide, and the rise of right-wing market within the country paved the way for the demise of the Planning Commission.

Planning commission to Niti Aayog

- The replacement of PC by NA has no substance as it does not play any role in transforming a deeply unequal society into a modern economy that ensures the welfare of all its citizens, irrespective of their social identity.
- It has no role in influencing, directing, public or private investment.
- It does not seem to have any influence in policymaking with long-term consequences (for instance, demonetization and the Goods and Services Tax).

Concerns

- NITI Aayog is supposed to be a think tank. This implies that while generating new ideas, it maintains a respectable intellectual distance from the government of the day.
- Instead, what is seen is the uncritical praise of government-sponsored, acronym-infested schemes.
- It sings paeans to the virtues of the private corporate sector as the saviour of the Indian economy without realising, let alone appreciating, the foundational and socially oriented contribution of India's vast public sector.

What should Niti Aayog look into?

- Planning for a developing economy can be abandoned, but only at its own peril.
- The implication for a complex country like India that became an industrial economy late is that planning would, and should, remain a central function of the state in the medium run.
- However, we would contend that the Planning Commission, unfortunately, did not fulfill its function adequately. NITI Aayog will need to evolve into a much stronger organization than it is.

Examples from the world

- Chinese state ensured that after its market-oriented economic reforms began, its State Planning Commission became more powerful in the state apparatus.
    - The result was growth and poverty reduction on a scale unprecedented in history. China became the "factory of the world" — backed by an industrial policy driven by the National Development and Reforms Commission.
- In most of Latin America/Caribbean (LAC) countries and in Subsaharan Africa (SSA), two full decades of potential economic growth and human development were lost when per capita income barely rose even as populations continued to grow.
    - These countries abandoned planning and became captives of the Washington Consensus.
- But the East Asian and Southeast Asian countries had industrial policy which was planned and executed as part of five-year or longer-term plans.
    - It was precisely because these countries had planning institutions which went hand in hand with industrial policy that they managed to steer policies through turbulent times in the global economy, thus sustaining growth.
    - They did not experience such "lost decades" in the 1980s and 1990s, were their planning structures, backed by an industrial policy and implemented by learning bureaucracies.
    - That is how they were able to ride the wave of their demographic dividend, which comes but once in the life of a nation.
    - India cannot risk going the LAC/ SSA way, since it is already past the midpoint of its dividend.
    - While East Asian and Southeast Asian countries still had, and have, five-year plans, what was also integral to their planning was productive use of labour, their most abundant factor, through an export-oriented manufacturing strategy.
    - It was this strategy that was lacking in India's planning.

Way forward

- Planning will have to become more decentralized, but within a five-year plan framework.
- Bureaucracy will need to change from generalist to specialist, and its accountability will have to be based on outcomes achieved, not inputs or funds spent.
- It should look at aspects of long term planning, lifting poor of poverty, ensuring that people have a decent job with minimum wages, increasing labor participation of women, bringing the dalits and adivasis in better economic shape.

So what India requires is planning that addresses social justice, reduces regional and gender inequalities, and ensures environmental sustainability. NITI Aayog should spell out how these reforms.

Police Arrests should follow due Process

Introduction

- Arrest of a person is a procedure to be carried out by the police to prevent acts of disorder or lawlessness and should be used as a deterrent. So, this power of arrest is an extraordinary one, conferred on the police to be employed with discretion and deliberation, not as a tool of oppression and harassment at the hands of prosecuting authorities or the government of the day.
- The Supreme Court has emphasized that arrests should never be a reflexive response to an allegation of an offence, or even its commission.

Context

- The arrest of Swaraj India Party's chief, Yogendra Yadav who had gone to meet Tamilnadu farmers triggers this issue.
- Mr Yadav had gone to carry out a study about effects of Chennai-Salem eight-lane highway project on the farmers

Law that gives permission for police to arrest

- The law that empowers the police to arrest people without warrants (Section 41 of the CrPC)
    - It is reasonably stringent, demanding that some conditions be met, including that such arrests be carried out to prevent commission of further offences, tampering of evidence, and influencing of witnesses.
- The only safeguard that a citizen has is that he has to be produced before the jurisdictional magistrate at the earliest and not later than 24 hours (Section 57 Cr.P.C.)
- Section 167. Procedure when investigation cannot be completed in twenty four hours.
    - Whenever any person is arrested and detained in custody and it appears that the investigation cannot be completed within the period of twenty- four hours fixed by section 57, and there are grounds for believing that the accusation or information is well- founded, the officer in charge of the police station or the police officer making the investigation, if he is not below the rank of sub- inspector, shall forthwith transmit to the nearest Judicial Magistrate a copy of the entries in the diary hereinafter prescribed relating to the case, and shall at the same time forward the accused to such Magistrate.
- If the arrest affected by the police officer does not satisfy the requirements of Section 41 of the Code, Magistrate is duty bound not to authorize his further detention and release the accused.
    - In other words, when an accused is produced before the Magistrate, the police officer effecting the arrest is required to furnish to the Magistrate, the facts, reasons and its conclusions for

arrest and the Magistrate in turn is to be satisfied that condition recedent for arrest under Section 41 Cr.PC has been satisfied

Constitutional mandate

- As per Article 22(2), every person who is arrested and detained in custody shall be produced before the nearest magistrate within a period of twenty-four hours of such arrest excluding the time necessary for the journey from the place of arrest to court of the magistrate and no such person shall be detained in custody beyond the said period without the authority of a magistrate.

Arnesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2014)

- The Court in strong words possible has expressed its dissatisfaction as to how the power of arrest and detention is dealt by Police.
    - This Judgment speaks about the relationship between the police and public
- It records the power to authorize detention is a very' solemn function. It affects the liberty and freedom of citizens and needs to be exercised with great care and caution, if not exercised with due care it can 'bring humiliation… and cast scars forever'
- In many of the cases, detention is authorized in a routine, casual and careless manner.

Concerns

- In this prosecutorial ecosystem, jail succeeds in trumping bail almost every time
- Magistrates, who are empowered to refuse remand and grant bail, continue to issue orders mechanically.

Conclusion

- Lord Macaulay is credited with codifying the criminal laws in India in the mid- nineteenth century.
- The said codification gave birth to three major criminal Acts in the form of "Indian Penal Code, 1860", "Indian Evidence Act, 1872" and "Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (Amended)".
- This criminal code which was sought to bring about equality between the subjects as far as the criminal law was concerned, was introduced when India was still under the British Raj that time.
- This has resulted in retention of certain draconian colonial flavor in these statutes. So these laws which can penalize individuals have to be suitable mended to consider the constitutional mandate of Individual liberty and right to live with dignity as expressed in Article 21

Rajiv Gandhi assassination case

Context

- The Tamil Nadu Cabinet passed a resolution recommending the release of the seven convicts in the 1991 Rajiv Gandhi assassination case

Procedure

- Power of Governor to grant pardons, etc, and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases The Governor of a State shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extend

Background

- In March 2016, the Tamil Nadu government had proposed to release the convicts and sought the Centre's views on the issue.
- Centre rejects Tamil Nadu proposal to free the three.
- Three-judge Supreme Court Bench to decide on remission issue.
- The Supreme Court, considering the plea of Perarivalan, decides to hear the government on the conspiracy and making of the belt bomb that killed former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.
    - Perarivalan, makes a sworn statement before the Supreme Court that the CBI omitted the part of the convict's confession where he said he had "absolutely no idea" of the purpose for which the two nine volt batteries he bought would be used for.
- However the Centre told the Supreme Court that remission of their sentence would set a "dangerous precedent" and have "international ramifications".
- The Supreme Court asked the Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit to consider the mercy petition of AG Perarivalan and the six others.

What did the SC say in the earlier judgments in reference to CrPC?

- Supreme Court has laid down the law that a State government has no suo motu power to remit sentences of persons who were convicted under a Central law and cases investigated by a central agency like the CBI.
- Interpreting Section 435 (2) of the CrPC, the judgment held that the word 'consultation' means 'concurrence'. This means that TN govt should get the prior consent of the Centre to remit the sentences.

SC On governor's role

- SC in two decisions of the Constitution Bench — Maru Ram v. Union of India (1980) and Kehar Singh v. Union of India (1988) — the Supreme Court held that in exercising the power under Article 72 (the power of the President to grant pardons, and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases)

or Article 161 (the power of the Governor to do the same) of the Constitution, the President or the Governor has to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers and not at his or her own discretion.

- The constitutional power to grant pardon in Article 161 is different from the statutory power under the CrPC. Hence, the decision does not come in the way of the Governor granting pardon, without the concurrence of the Central government.
- Thus, the Governor of Tamil Nadu has no option but to release the seven convicts as suggested by Markandey katju former Judge of the Supreme Court of India.

Should the convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi case be released?- Yes

- In the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, the question is, would it be appropriate to remit the rest of the sentence.
- This case involves not only the assassination of a former Prime Minister, but also the deaths of several others in the incident, including policemen and bystanders.
- It may well be that the family of Rajiv Gandhi may have no objection. But equally, the families of the other victims need to express their preferences. Mercy cannot be extended only because a prominent victim's family desires it.

Background

- The legal history of these prisoners has endured its twists and turns. Their mercy petitions were kept undecided for 11 years, between 2000 and 2011, by the highest constitutional offices.
- In August 2011, the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly adopted a resolution recommending commutation of their death sentences.
- The Supreme Court, in Union of India v. V. Sriharan (2015), eventually commuted the death sentences to rigorous imprisonment for the remainder of their lives, thereby providing a glimmer of hope for further commutation of sentences under Section 435 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

What does the law say?

- The scope of constitutional powers under Article 161 was not examined by any of these judgments, and the Governor, as the repository of the executive powers of the state, is bound to take a decision "in harmony" with the Council of Ministers, which has already recommended their release.
- The division of powers places "public order" under Entry 1 of List II (State List) of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. Therefore, the matter must lie within the exclusive remit of the State government.
- The commutation of sentence vide V. Sriharan v. Union of India (2014) automatically brings the Tamil Nadu Prison Rules into play.
- Rule 341 states that the Advisory Board of the prison shall deem life imprisonment to be "imprisonment for twenty years" for consideration for premature release or parole.
- It naturally follows that these prisoners in question must be dealt with under the Rules in the same manner as would any other prisoner serving a sentence in a prison in Tamil Nadu. Any divergence from this principle would be ultra vires on the ground of arbitrariness.

Reforming prisoners

- Our prisons, for all their faults, must ultimately stay loyal to the theory of reformative justice. Under this theory, a crime is committed on account of a set of peculiar circumstances, and it is highly probable that these circumstances may never repeat again.

- Therefore, the focus of our prison system should be in bringing about reform in the moral character of each prisoner and enabling him to restart his life outside the jail complex after serving his sentence.

They should be released?

- Any further delay in ordering the release of the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case will run the risk of the state falling foul of Article 14 of the Constitution which says that it "shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws".
- Hundreds of prisoners who have been convicted of similar crimes have had their sentences pardoned under Article 161.
- So, in the present case, it must be extended to the convicts regardless of the crime or punishment or any other consideration.

No

Pardon is a discretion

- Pardon is not a right. Pardon is an act of discretion exercised in specific circumstances where an individual deserving of clemency is examined in the context of his family background.
- The dependence of his family on him, a critical emergency or a serious health issue necessitates his release.
- Pardon is not meant to be exercised without justifiable grounds.

Caution to be exercised

- The Supreme Court has warned against their release.
- Given the large political conspiracy involved in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, there does not appear to be any justification for exercising the extraordinary powers of pardon in their case.
- In the rare instances when death sentences have been awarded, they have been strictly followed through. The entire purport of the death sentence is very clear. In the present instance, the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, which itself is an act of clemency.

Anti-terrorist measures

- The object of anti-terrorist measures is two-fold.
    - The first is to deter future activity
    - The second is to prevent terrorist activities.
- The reason anti-terrorist laws are made, and are to some extent different from regular laws, is that they address acts that destabilize the country.
- Pardon can be exercised only in the interests of a nation
- No ground appears to exist to agitate again on issues which have been deliberated upon by constitutional and statutory authorities.

So there cannot be any compromise on the question of national security or national sovereignty.

What should be done?

Life imprisonment

- It is a misconception that upon the completion of 14 years of imprisonment, a life sentence has been served.

- The Supreme Court, in Gopal Vinayak Godse v. the State of Maharashtra (1961), ruled that a sentence of imprisonment for life means imprisonment for the rest of one's natural life.
- However, there is always the power of executive remission, under which the appropriate government reduces part of the sentence for the convict's good behaviour.

Complications

- If people can be freed even after being convicted for the murder of a former Prime Minister in a terror incident, questions could be asked whether India is a soft state on matters of terrorism.
- A release order in this case may be cited as a precedent in other cases where terrorists and their co-conspirators are serving sentences of imprisonment for life.

Solution

- A case may be made to say that the perpetrator and the principal conspirator are dead, and that those who were imprisoned were mere pawns, some of whom may not have known the entirety of the enterprise.
- In these circumstances, to routinely deny the benefit of remission may not always be appropriate.

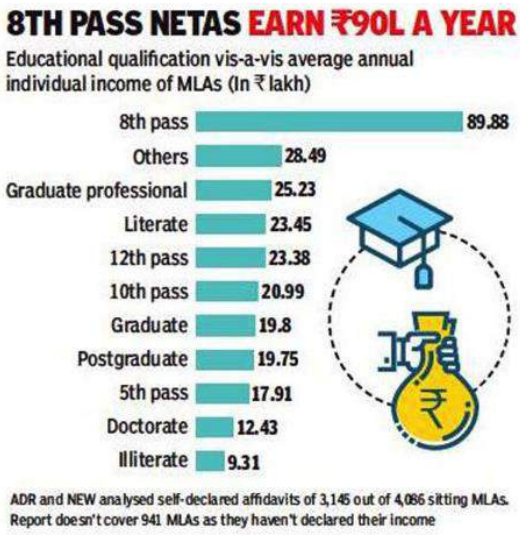
Salaries of Legislators Survey

Context

- The income analyses released by ADR and National Election Watch released shows Sitting MLAs across the country have an average annual income of Rs. 24.59 lakh

Details

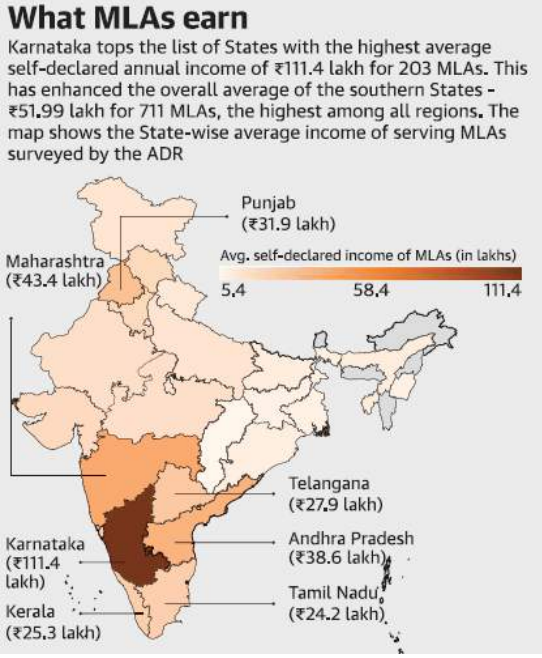
- MLAs from Karnataka topped the charts with an average of over Rs. 1 crore per annum,
- MLAs from Chhattisgarh earn the lowest with their average annual income coming at Rs. 5.4 lakh
- MLAs who have declared they to be illiterate have an average annual self-income of Rs. 9.31 lakh.
- Nearly half of the MLAs have declared their profession as business or agriculture.
- The study also revealed that the average income of men was more than double that of the women MLAs.



MLAs from the south have an average declared annual income of ₹52 lakh, according to a study by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), while MLAs from the east are the least wealthy, with average income of ₹8.5 lakh

Region	No. of MLAs*	Income (₹Cr) **	Avg Income (₹ Lakh)**
Southern	711	369.7	52.0
Western	627	178.2	28.4
Northern	778	126.7	16.3
Central	231	29.2	12.7
North Eastern	180	16.8	9.3
Eastern	614	52.4	8.5
Total	3,141	773.1	24.6

*Analysed, **Declared Annual



Recommendations

- ADR said it should be mandatory for candidates to declare their annual income in their affidavit, whether or not they have filed their ITR returns.
- It also called for a uniform categorization of professions declared by the candidates
- Candidates should declare the detailed amount of income from each source.

Role of the mosque in Islam

Background

- The question regarding whether the mosque is integral to Islam had come up as part of the Ayodhya dispute when in 1994 the Supreme Court had stated that "a mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and namaz (prayer) by Muslims can be offered anywhere, even in open".
- The verdict given in the Ismail Farooqui case, therefore, ruled that the government could, if needed acquire the land on which a mosque has been built.

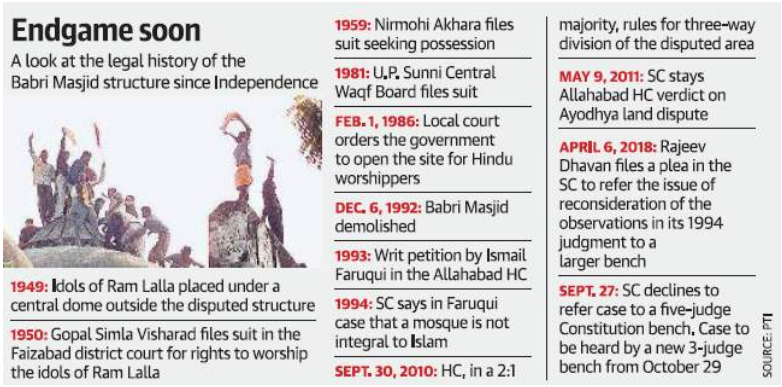
What did SC say?

- Speaking for the majority judgement of himself and the Chief Justice on the issue of referring the question "if a "mosque as a place of prayer is an essential part of Islam", in the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid appeals, to a seven-judge Bench, Justice Ashok Bhushan said references cannot be made to a larger Bench merely because of "questionable observations" made in an earlier judgment.
- Justice Bhushan said the statement made in the 1994 Faruqui verdict was in the context of whether the mosque, which was acquired by the Ayodhya Act of 1993, had immunity from acquisition.
- The statement meant that no place of worship, be it a temple, church or mosque, is immune from acquisition. It merely wanted to convey that mosques had "no special immunity from acquisition". The context had nothing to do with the essentiality of the practice of offering prayers or namaz in a mosque.
- Acquisition, Justice Bhushan observed, is a sovereign power. The power of acquisition is available for a mosque like any other place of worship. Places of worship of all religions are liable to be acquired by the government under the Doctrine of Eminent Domain.

Doctrine of Eminent Domain

- The government or the King has the supreme power to take the property of any person over the interest of general public
- Scindia Employees' Union v. State of Maharashtra & Others
    - The right of eminent domain is the right of the State to reassert either temporarily or permanently its dominion over any piece of land on account of public exigency and for public good
    - The concept of public purpose should include the matters, such as, safety, security, health, welfare and prosperity of the community or public at large.
    - The very object of compulsory acquisition is in exercise of the power of eminent domain by the State against the wishes or willingness of the owner or person interested in the land. Therefore, so long as the public purpose subsists the exercise of the power of eminent domain cannot be questioned.

Timeline



No other book can trump the Indian Constitution

Editorial Analysis:

- On January 26, 1950, for the first time in Indian history, we, believers and practitioners of diverse philosophies and religions, decided to also become the people of a single book.
- This book was the Constitution of India.
- This was the only way to knit ourselves together into one modern nation.
- Irrespective of how inadequate our Constitution might be, an enduring consensus exists that it provides a strong, secure foundation for an inclusive, dignity-protecting, and freedom-sensitive society.
- It was devised by men and women of diverse faiths, speaking different languages and belonging to different castes; its basic structure is sound and needs no altering.

Religion and the State:

- According to the Constitution, the state should not interfere in the choice of individuals or groups in their quest for ultimate self-fulfillment.
- As a matter of fact, this is precisely what religious freedom means.

- Secondly, the Constitution acknowledges the value of distinct traditions but simultaneously recognizes that aspects of any tradition necessitate that they are reinterpreted, reinvigorated and refashioned. This is also true of religion.
- The Constitution of India also demands a social revolution.
- It signifies a break from unjustifiable hierarchical norms of the past to build a defensible egalitarian ethos in the present where everyone can live with dignity and respect.
- The state needs not strict separation but principled distance from all religions.
- The state disengages from religion or engages with it, engages positively (actively promoting religion) or negatively (intervene to inhibit it), and in order to treat all as equals, does not accord the same treatment but, as the occasion demands, helps or hinders one religion more than others.
- As a consequence to this, without abandoning overall respect for Hinduism, the degrading practice of untouchability which was justified by certain Hindu texts, had to be abolished.
- It is important to note that in 1956, thanks to the efforts of Ambedkar, Nehru and several progressive Hindus, Parliament partially reformed Hinduism by passing the Hindu Code Bills.
- This saved Hinduism from decay by giving Hindu women a stake in their received religion. As a consequence, for the first time, Hindu women could remain Hindus and yet move towards greater equality and freedom. The majority of Hindus benefited from it even if a section of the Hindu orthodoxy was displeased.

Concluding Remarks:

- In light of this, it is believed that abominable practices in our society need to be stopped.
- For example, the practice of instant triple talaq is an abominable practice rejected by many Muslim countries.
- This practice gives enormous power to Muslim males, and is deeply degrading to Muslim women.
- It is believed that perpetuating this practice when other forms of civil contractual practices, compatible with both the Constitution and a more meaningfully interpreted Quran, are available continues an injustice to existing victims and disrespects the 'holy book' of democracy.

For liberty's sake

Background:

- Certain activists came under scrutiny for allegedly being members of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) and joining a conspiracy against the government.
- Among these, five prominent activists were arrested by the Pune police last month.
- The Supreme Court has granted these activists the rare relief of remaining in house arrest while it examines the charges against them.

A Note on Article 32 of the Indian Constitution:

- According to this article. the Supreme Court of India shall have power to issue directions or orders or writs, including writs in the nature of habeas corpus, mandamus, prohibition, quo warranto and certiorari, whichever may be appropriate, for the enforcement of any of the rights conferred by this Part.
- Further, Article 32(1) provides for the right to move the Supreme Court by appropriate proceedings for the enforcement of the fundamental rights.

- Also, the Supreme Court under Article 32(2) is free to devise any procedure for the enforcement of fundamental right and it has the power to issue any process necessary in a given case. It is in the view of this constitutional provision; the Supreme Court of India may even give remedial assistance, which may include compensation in "appropriate cases".

Analysis

- The Supreme Court of India must now decide on one of the following courses.

Theseinclude:
a) to allow the police in Maharashtra to pursue its investigation against the activists for allegedly being members of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) and joining a conspiracy against the government,
1. b) To order a probe by an independent team.

The Issue of Contention:

- The issue that is being debated here is the Centre's contention that it is probing a terrorist conspiracy involving Maoist insurgents and their urban supporters, on one hand and the counter-argument to this being that this is a disguised crackdown on political dissent.
- There have been several petitioners, including historian Romila Thapar.
- These petitioners have questioned the motivation for the police raids on the residences of these activists and a few others in a coordinated operation across several States.
- These petitioners want those arrested to be released and demand an independent investigation.
- The Maharashtra State government and Union government have sought to defend the arrest and prosecution. Their contention is that the case is based on incriminating evidence, seized during the probe and has nothing to do with the ideology or the political views of those under investigation.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that in entertaining this petition, the Supreme Court has set the stage for an examination of some fundamental questions.
- These fundamental questions lie at the intersection of criminal procedure and constitutional law.
- In particular, there are two questions that emerge 1) Procedural 2) Substantive

Procedural Question: Whether or not in a criminal matter, the court can entertain a petition under Article 32 of the Constitution, under which the Supreme Court enforces fundamental rights, for which the accused are expected to seek their remedy under the Code of Criminal Procedure?
Substantive Question: Should the court intervene when the liberty of citizens and their right to dissent are sought to be denied by arbitrary police action?

In conclusion, the government may need to look into the possibility of a precedent being set, whereby every accused can rush to the Supreme Court immediately on arrest.

- Further, at the same time, one cannot deny the peculiar circumstances in which a case relating to violence at a Dalit commemoration dramatically morphed into a Maoist plot.
- Further, it is a matter of intrigue that one city's police is investigating a crime that supposedly spans several States. Further, that this matter involves the purchase of arms and providing strategic inputs to armed rebellion. Thus, shouldn't this not be handed over to a national agency for further investigation? This is a question that needs to be answered.

2. ECONOMY

2008 Economic crisis and its dimensions

Background

- The East Asian crisis of 1997 caused a rethink on full capital account convertibility and fixed exchange rates
- The Internet bubble and bust of the early 2000s led many to question the impact of new technology on long-term productivity growth.
- The scandals in the corporate world through the 2000s in the US in Energy and telecom sectors provided grist for a fresh debate on corporate governance.
- Then came the financial crisis of 2008

The crisis of 2007 had multiple causes

- Global macroeconomic imbalances, a loose monetary policy in the U.S., the housing bubble in the U.S. again and elsewhere, a bloated financial sector, a flawed belief in efficient markets, greedy bankers, incompetent rating agencies — these and others have been identified as among the villains of the crisis.
- Most of the blame for the implosion of the financial sector in 2007-08 lies elsewhere — in a failure of regulation.
- One, banks were allowed extraordinarily high levels of debt in relation to equity capital.
- Two, banks in the advanced economies moved away from the business of making loans to investing their funds instead in complex assets called "securitized" assets.
    - The securitized assets consisted of bundles of securities derived from sub-prime loans that are, housing loans of relatively higher risk.
    - The switch from loans to securitized assets had enormous implications for banks. With a loan, losses are recognized over time.
    - In contrast, investments are 'mark to market', that is, losses or gains on these have to be recorded instantly.
    - As housing prices started falling and the securitized assets lost value, it translated into enormous losses for banks.
- Third element in the failure of regulation was allowing banks excess dependence on short-term funds.
    - These losses eroded bank capital and created panic among those who had lent funds to banks.
    - The lenders to banks, it turned out, were not primarily retail depositors but short-term lenders in the wholesale market.
- Fourth was the failures of regulation. Banks had low standards for making housing loans.
    - Bankers' pay was designed so that it allowed them to take excessive risk. The boards of banks did not exercise adequate oversight.

Global repercussions

- These failures were not confined to the U.S. They infected banks in Europe and some in Asia as well.
- These banks were not merely exposed to American assets. The sub-prime problem was thus not just an American problem but a problem for large chunks of the global banking system.

Implications

- As wholesale markets dried up, the Fed provided dollar funds to central banks in Europe and in Asia.
- Governments everywhere rushed to save their financial institutions.
- Central banks provided liquidity support to banks.
- The failure of banks was sought to be counteracted by fiscal and monetary expansion. The loss of jobs and output has been enormous.
- Various political consequences have unfolded: the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, the rise of nationalism and anti-immigrant policies, the Trump phenomenon in the U.S. and the return of protectionism.

How did such a massive failure of regulation occur?

- The problem was 'regulatory capture', the ability of financial institutions to influence polices of governments and regulators.
- Financial institutions are a big source of political funding.

- There is also the 'revolving door' syndrome. Bankers in the U.S. and Europe hop on to jobs in government and regulation. Government officials and regulators land lucrative jobs and assignments with banks.
    - The 'revolving door' plays havoc with regulation
    - It must also explain the total lack of accountability of bankers for the havoc they created. No top banker has been prosecuted or jailed

How India managed the crisis?

- Growth has slowed down to 7%.
- Several prudent policies have helped. India has not embraced full capital account convertibility.
- It has kept short-term foreign borrowings within stringent limits.
- India did not open up to foreign banks despite pressure from the U.S. and the international agencies
    - Foreign banks retreated from overseas markets following the crisis, causing a severe credit crunch in places such as Eastern Europe. India escaped this fate.

Measures taken to reform

- The key reform measures have focused on getting banks to have more equity capital and to reduce dependence on short-term borrowings.
- The design of executive pay has been changed so as to reduce incentives for taking excessive short-term risk.
- Some improvements in governance have been effected.

Unresolved core issues

- First, the 'too big to fail problem' — some banks being so large that they cannot be allowed to fail.
    - Some of the biggest banks in the world have grown even bigger after the crisis. Concentration in banking has increased.
- Second, the size of debt in various forms in the world economy. A crucial aspect of the financial crisis was the build-up of private debt, that is, the debt of households and non-financial firms.
    - So the regulation must address growth in credit as well as the flow of credit into sectors such as real estate.
    - In the years following the crisis, private debt has fallen but government debt and corporate debt have risen.
- Third, financial globalization makes the world vulnerable to U.S. monetary and fiscal policy.
    - From time to time, the U.S. unleashes a flood of dollars at low rates. The world laps up the cheap finance.
    - Then, the U.S. raises interest rates. Other economies find themselves staring at huge debt repayments. Further, the dollar remains the reserve currency of the world.

Conclusion

- The present crisis in emerging economies highlights how vulnerable emerging markets are to the vagaries of American economic policy.
- The world needs to be weaned away from its dependence on the dollar. Alas,
- So an alternative global financial architecture is required.
- Economists are free to draw their lessons from financial crises but the world is ultimately shaped by political and business interests, not by economists.

Aapoorti app

Context

- Piyush Goyal-led Railway Ministry has launched the Aapoorti mobile app of Indian Railways e-procurement system (IREPS). The Aapoorti mobile app has been launched in a bid to provide information as well as data related to e-tendering and e-auction related activities of the national transporter.

Details

- This App provides information and data related to e-tendering and e-auction related activities of Indian Railways.
- For e-tendering activities, users can see details related to tenders published, tenders closed, purchase orders placed.
- For activities related to e-auction of scrap sale, users can see upcoming auctions, auction schedules, sale conditions, details of material available for e-auction, auctioning units.
- User manuals of IREPS are also made available on the App.
- The App also provides for rating of the app and taking feedback from users which shall help us continuously improve the app.

Agmark

Context

- The Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare launched an online platform for processing applications related to quality certification mark 'Agmark' for agricultural products.

Details

- Agmark is certification mark that assures conformity to a set of standards approved by the government agency Directorate of Marketing and Inspection.
- Through the Agmark online system, certificate of authorization (domestic), permission of printing press, permission of laboratories (domestic) and services related to laboratory information management system will be provided online

What was the need?

- The existing procedures for Agmark certification were in physical form and time consuming.
- The use of modern technologies by the National Informatics Center has made these processes easy, reliable and cost effective by providing online electronic mode.
- In the new online application system, there are provisions for online receipt of fees from the applicants. Payment will be received in digital mode through bharatkosh.gov.in website.

Significance

- The process of application will be simple, quick, transparent and 24x7

Argentina Economic Turmoil

What is happening with Argentina's economy?

- Argentina's currency, the peso, has lost approximately 50% of its value in 2018 and 25% in August alone, falling to new lows as confidence in the currency continued to drop.
- President Mauricio Macri asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to accelerate the disbursement of a $50 billion loan, on the premise that the money could be used for servicing debt and intervening in currency markets.
- Mr. Marci said that a lack of confidence in the peso and inflation of around 30% (It is the highest amongst G20 nations) had compelled him to do this. The IMF had already disbursed a tranche of $15 billion in June.
- Most of Argentina's debt is dollar denominated and the growing weakness of the peso against the dollar has been a cause for concern to markets.

Background

- Cristina Fernández de Kirchner government was in power from 2007 until 2015.
- They raised public spending, nationalized companies and heavily subsidized many items of daily life ranging from utilities to football transmissions on television.
- Most importantly it controlled the exchange rate, which created all sorts of practical problems, such as giving rise to a black market for dollars and heavily distorting prices.

What has been the response?

- Argentina's central bank announced that it was increasing the quantum of reserves banks would have to hold, and it hiked interest rates to 60%, to rein in inflation and increase investor confidence in its currency (higher interest rates attract more capital).
- The administration announced "emergency" austerity measures, including temporary increases in export taxes on certain raw and processed agricultural goods; soymeal, soya bean and corn represent a large chunk of exports (over 30% in 2016).
- Also in the works are a 27% cut in capital spending and closing down and consolidation of ministries (from 19 to 10).
- The administration has said it will have a balanced budget in 2019 and a budget surplus of 1% by 2020 — significantly more ambitious than the 1.3% budget deficit target set by the IMF as part of the bailout agreement.

Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna

Context

- The Ministry of Labour and Employment announced a scheme to financially support those who lost their jobs and were covered under the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948.

Details

- The ABVKY is a scheme approved by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) that aims to benefit its subscribers, who are mainly formal sector workers who have become unemployed for whatever reason, by providing cash through bank account transfer.
- This scheme is a relief payable in cash directly to their Bank Account in case of unemployment and while they search for new engagement

Bogibeel Bridge- India longest road-rail bridge

- It is a combined road and rail bridge over the Brahmaputra River in Assam between Dhemaji district and Dibrugarh district.
- Upon its expected completion at the end of 2018 the 4.94 km bridge, work on which was started in 2002, wpule be the longest rail-cum-road bridge in India.
- Bogibeel is the fourth rail-road bridge on the Brahmaputra River in Assam.
- Bogibeel bridge connects the North and South banks of river Brahmaputra and is situated in the eastern region of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.
- The foundation stone for Bogibeel bridge was laid down by former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2002.
- Built at an estimated cost of Rs 4857 crore, the Bogibeel bridge is the second longest in Asia.

Construction

- The bridge, which has been made making use of techniques from Sweden and Denmark, is much lighter when compared to bridges with riveted girders.
    - The design too is similar to a bridge that connects Sweden and Denmark.

Significance

- Due to its location, the bridge will be of strategic importance to India as it will significantly enhance India's ability to transport troops and supplies to its border with Tibet in Arunachal Pradesh
- The bridge is located just over 20 km away from the Assam- Arunachal Pradesh border and is thus expected to act as an alternative to the Kolia Bhomora Setu, Tezpur in providing connectivity to nearly five million people residing in Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Bogibeel bridge will save a lot of time both in terms of road and rail travel
    - As of now a train journey from Arunachal Pradesh to Assam's Dibrugarh means a detour of 500 kilometres via Guwahati. But, with the Bogibeel bridge, the train journey will be less than 100 kilometres!

Capital Structure

- This refers to how a firm uses debt and equity in different proportions to finance its operations.
    - Some firms might finance most of their operations through the use of debt while others may be debt-free and be completely financed through equity capital provided by the owners.
- A firm with a relatively high proportion of debt financing its operations compared to the size of its equity is generally considered to be riskier than one that is financed primarily through equity.
- At the same time, since the use of leverage helps to multiply the size of overall gains, the use of debt can help the owners of a firm earn a higher return on their investment.

Chardham Highway Project

- The Chardham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojna, is an ambitious initiative to improve connectivity to the Char Dham pilgrimage centres in the Himalayas
- Char Dham (Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath)
- The project's main objective is to develop around 900 km of national highways to make the travel safer and more convenient.
- The project will be falling along NH-134 (old NH-94) in the State of Uttarakhand. The project will be built under Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode

What was the need?

- The highway network along Char Dham got severely devastated following the cloudburst in 2013.
- The roads leading to Gangotri and Badrinath are also equally important from a strategic point of view as these roads are used for supply and deployment to the defence establishments along the Indo-China border areas in Uttarakhand.

Components

- The project involves widening the existing, geometrically deficient highway that connects the four abodes.
- Apart from widening, the road transport and highways ministry plans to improve the stretches to two-lane carriageway with paved shoulders, protect landslide hazard zones, construct bypasses, long bridges, tunnels and elevated corridors to ensure safety for the users.

Significance

- Connectivity & tourism will get a strong boost through the project.
- The construction of this tunnel will provide all weather connectivity to Yamunotri
- It will reduce the travel distance from Dharasu to Yamunotri by about 20 km and travel time by about an hour.
- The proposed tunnel will save number of trees that would have been required to be removed in the road improvement of 25.600 km, had the original alignment been followed.

Cocoa butter important source of vitamin D

Context

- Cocoa butter and dark chocolate can be a significant source of Vitamin D and may help reduce the risk of respiratory diseases and brittle bones, according to the study, published in the journal Food Chemistry.

Details

Vitamin D is crucial for the human body. It comes in two types: vitamin D2 and D3.

- Vitamin D3 is produced in the human skin through exposure to the sun. Humans get 90 per cent of their vitamin D requirements this way.
    - The rest is ideally consumed through food, such as fatty fish or chicken eggs.
- Vitamin D2, which can also be utilized by the human body, is found in fungi.

Other Uses

- Cocoa is the dried and fully fermented fatty seed of the cacao tree from which chocolate is made.
- "Cocoa" can often also refer to the drink commonly known as hot chocolate; cocoa powder, the dry powder made by grinding cocoa seeds

Where is it grown in India?

- Cocoa plant is a small (4 to 8 m height) evergreen tree. In India, it is mainly cultivated in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu mainly as intercrop with Arecanut and Coconut.

Climatic Conditions

- Cocoa can be grown up to 300 m above mean sea level.
- It requires a minimum of 90-100 mm rainfall per month with an annual rainfall of 1500-2000 mm.

- The plants need equitable climate with well distributed rainfall.
- The temperature range of 15°-39°C with optimum of 25°C is considered ideal.

Soil

- Cocoa requires deep and well drained soils. Poorly drained soil affects growth of plants. Majority of area under Cocoa cultivation is on clay loam and sandy loam soil. It grows well in the pH range of 6.5 to 7.0.

Coffee- Technology Initiatives

Context

- Minister for Commerce & Industry and Civil Aviation, Suresh Prabhu launched Coffee Connect - India coffee field force app and Coffee KrishiTharanga - digital mobile extension services for coffee stakeholders

Coffee Connect

- It has been developed to ease the work of field functionaries and to improve the work efficiency
- This application provides solution by harnessing the power of mobility comprising the latest technology in easing the whole process of the field activities like digitization of Coffee Growers & Estates with Geo Tagging, collecting the Plantation details.
- It will also help in transparency in the activities of the extension officers and officials, transparency in subsidy disbursement and real time report generation.

Coffee KrishiTharanga

- They are aimed at providing customized information and services to increase productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability. The customized services are two ways, 24 X 7 service supports.
- The "Coffee KrishiTharanga" is pilot tested in the Chikmagalur and Hassan districts of Karnataka State covering 30,000 farmers during the first year and will be extended to remaining growers in a phased manner.
- NABARD has partly funded the Pilot project. The solution will help in to reach maximum growers in limited period, efficient, timely, customized advisory, improve the efficiency through digitization and leverage existing mobile reach for wider delivery of improved technology.

Significance

- Coffee Board has taken key digital initiatives for the overall technological advancement of the coffee sector and value chain.
- These initiatives are aimed at benefiting all stakeholders in the coffee value chain. All these initiatives are intended towards unlocking the potential in coffee sector by leveraging the technology and reach such as mobile.
- The farmers being the end user the technologies have been built on certain critical principles like ease of use, wider participation, maximize reach and benefit.

Committee on Stressed Power Projects

- The government has set up an empowered committee headed by cabinet secretary P.K. Sinha, who was earlier India's power secretary.

- It will have representatives from the ministry of railways, ministry of finance, ministry of power, ministry of coal and the lenders having major exposure to the power sector
- This comes in the backdrop of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in power generation accounting for around 5.9% of the banking sector's total outstanding advances of ₹ 4.73 trillion, according to the Economic Survey 2016-17

Objectives

The committee would look into the various issues with a view to resolve them and maximise the efficiency of investment including changes required to be made in the fuel allocation policy, regulatory framework, mechanisms to facilitate sale of power, ensure timely payments, payment security mechanism, changes required in the provisioning norms/Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), Asset Restructuring Company (ARC) Regulations and any other measures proposed for revival of stressed assets so as to avoid such investments becoming NPA.

Context

- The Power Ministry gave a detailed presentation to a high-level empowered committee on measures to deal with problems of struggling power assets

Credit Suisse Report

Context

- According to Credit Suisse Research Institute's latest report India has the third highest number of publicly-listed family-owned companies in the world

Credit Suisse Research Institute

- The Credit Suisse Research Institute is Credit Suisse's in-house think tank.
- The Institute was established in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis with the objective of studying long-term economic developments, which have – or promise to have – a global impact within and beyond the financial services industry.

Criteria

Credit Suise identified family businesses based on two criteria—

- Direct shareholding by founders or descendants is at least 20%,
- Voting rights held by the founders or descendants are at least 20%.

Details

- China tops the list with 159 companies, followed by the US at 121 and India at 111 Companies.
    - The number of Indian companies in the report increased from 108 in 2017 to 111
    - In the case of China, the number declined to 159 in 2018 from 167 in 2017.
- What makes India stand out is the fact that more than 50 per cent of the top 30 best performing family-owned companies in Asia, excluding Japan, are from India.
- The survey looks at 1,015 family-owned companies around the world with a minimum market capitalization of $250 million.
- By that measure, over 50% of the companies in the BSE 100, the top 100 companies by market capitalization listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange, are family-owned.
    - The average market capitalization of the family-owned companies was $7.6 billion compared to $6.5 billion a year ago, according to the report.
    - That includes Reliance Industries Ltd, Dabur India Ltd and Emami Ltd.

- The study further found that family-owned companies across emerging markets were much younger than their peers in developed markets.
- Family-owned companies in developed Europe were founded on an average 82 years ago compared to 37 years ago in the case of companies in Asia ex-Japan and 30 years in Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA).

Why family owned business works?

- The family-owned businesses do well because they have the skin in the game and the involvement is extremely high. The owner is far more passionate.
- The trend could also be due to superior financial performance driven by the longer-term focus that family-owned companies appear to have

Expense Ratio for MF schemes cut down by SEBI

Context

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has broadly accepted the recommendations of the H.R. Khan Committee on Know-Your-Client (KYC) requirements for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), while lowering the Total Expense Ratio (TER) for open-ended equity schemes, thereby making it less expensive for investors to invest in mutual funds.
- SEBI has agreed to amend the circular [issued in April] and the new one is largely in line with Khan Committee recommendations

Expense Ratio

- It is the annual fee charged by the mutual fund scheme to manage money on behalf of individuals.
- It covers the fund manager's fee along with other expenses required to run the fund administration.
    - Asset Management Companies (AMCs) employ highly qualified professionals to track developments in equity, debt and money markets and then transact accordingly in the asset markets to attain the objectives that are stated in the fund's offer documents. For such specialized services, the AMC pays a management fee to the professionals.
    - There are operating expenses too, such as the fee for transfer and registrar agents.
        - They are responsible for issuing and redeeming units of the mutual fund and providing other related services, such as preparation of transfer documents and updating investor records.
    - Other than these charges, a fee is also paid to the custodian, who buys and sells securities in large volumes.
    - Moreover, there are legal expenses, audit fees, as well as marketing and distribution expenses
    - A mutual fund recovers such costs through its unit holders on a daily basis. The daily Net Asset Values (NAVs) of a fund scheme are reported after deducting such expenses, though the expense ratio is disclosed only once every six months.
- If the funds' assets are small, the expense ratio can be quite high so that the fund can meet its expenses from a restricted or a smaller asset base.
- If the net assets of the fund are large, the expense percentage should ideally diminish as expenses are spread across a wider asset base.
- Therefore it measures per unit cost of managing a fund.

Changes made by SEBI

- The market regulator, SEBI sets a ceiling for the expense ratio

    - For equity mutual fund
    - For debt funds,
    - for index funds
    - For fund of funds (FoFs)
- SEBI capped the TER for equity-oriented mutual fund schemes (close-ended and interval schemes) at 1.25% and for other schemes at 1%.
    - However, it allowed an extra 30 basis points (bps) for selling in B-30 (beyond top 30) cities. One basis point is one-hundredth of a percentage point.
- The TER cap for fund of funds will be 2.25% for equity-oriented schemes and 2% for other schemes.

Additional expense

- The regulator has, however, allowed an additional expense ratio of 30 basis points for retail flows from beyond the top 30 cities.
- More importantly, the additional expense will not be allowed for flows from corporates and institutions.

Laws managing losses in the Market

- The regulator has framed the SEBI (Settlement Proceedings) Regulations 2018 which bar offences that cause a market wide impact, loss to investors or affects the integrity of the market, to be settled through the consent route.
- While serious offences like insider trading or front running can be settled through consent, the regulator has said that it would use a principle-based approach while deciding on such matters.
- The regulator will also not settle any proceedings wherein the applicant is a wilful defaulter or if an earlier application for the same offence has been rejected.

Other Measures

- The board of the capital markets has also approved a framework for permitting foreign entities having an exposure in physical commodity market to hedge in the commodity derivatives segment.
- Sebi also reduced the time period for listing after an initial public offering to three days from six, freeing up locked investor funds faster.

Significance

- The regulator is of the view that the lower expense ratio would lead to investors saving ₹1,300 crore to ₹1,500 crore in commissions.
- It will enhance returns for investors. However, the change in TER may impact profit margins of AMCs.
    - Early listing and trading of shares will benefit both issuers and investors.
    - Issuers will have faster access to the capital raised, thereby enhancing the ease of doing business and the investors will have early liquidity

Financial Inclusion Index

Context

- The Union Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs, Shri Arun Jaitley launched the Financial Inclusion Index after his Annual Performance Review Meeting with CEOs of the Public Sector Banks in New Delhi

Details

- Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance will release an Annual Financial Inclusion Index (FII) which will be a measure of access and usage of a basket of formal financial products and services that includes savings, remittances, credit, insurance and pension products.
- The index will have three measurement dimensions;
    - Access to financial services
    - Usage of financial services
    - Quality.

Significance

- The single composite index gives a snap shot of level of financial inclusion that would guide Macro Policy perspective.
- The various components of the index will also help to measure financial services for use of internal policy making.
- Financial Inclusion Index can be used directly as a composite measure in development indicators.
- It enables fulfilment of G20 Financial Inclusion Indicators requirements.
- It will also facilitate researchers to study the impact of financial inclusion and other macro-economic variables.

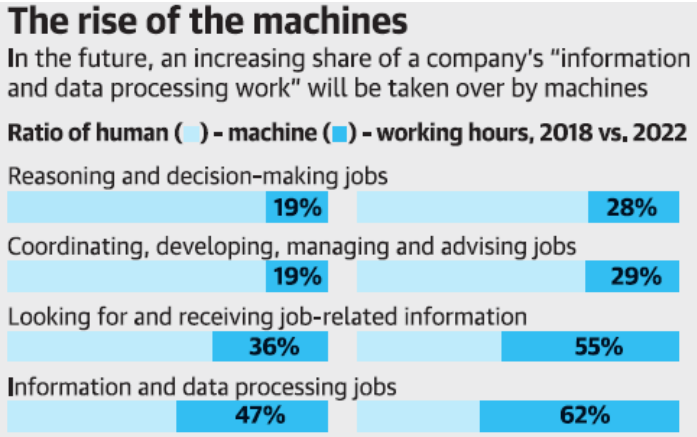
'Future of Jobs' Report- World Economic Forum (WEF)

Context

- "The Future of Jobs 2018" report by WEF predicts that the rise of robotics will result in machines performing more tasks on the job than humans by 2025. It also estimates that while that trend could displace 75 million jobs globally by 2022, it'll create 133 million new positions.
- The report surveyed executives from different industries around the world, aiming to get a look at how new technologies, like artificial intelligence, will affect the global labor force.

Details

- In 2018, humans performed an average of 71% of total task hours across the 12 industries spanning manufacturing, services and high tech.
    - By 2025, that will drop to just 48%, according to the WEF. Machines will perform the remaining 52%.
- Globally, almost half of all companies expect automation to cut their full-time workforce in the next four years;
    - However, new jobs will still lead to a net gain in employment opportunities if sufficient reskilling is done.
- In India, 54% of employees in these sectors will need reskilling by 2022
    - Of this 35% would need at least six months' worth of reskilling,
    - 10% would need more than a year of training in order to meet the demands of the new economy



Significance

- Roles that rely on human skills, like sales, marketing and scientific-based positions, will likely see an increase in demand.
- The report calls on businesses and government leaders around the world to create a support system for their employees and ensure a smooth transition as the workforce evolves.

Concerns

- They expect that some routine-based human-held positions will become non-essential in the future, like data entry or payroll clerks.
- There could be risk of widening skill gaps, heightening inequality and raising polarization if managed poorly.

Way Forward

- WEF says reskilling and upskilling of employees as an urgent imperative.

Global Media Compact

Context

- India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is among more than 30 organizations from across the world that has come together to form a global media compact aimed at advancing awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Details

- The SDG Media Compact is an initiative marking a new drive to advance awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were unanimously adopted by all world leaders at the United Nations in 2015.
- The Compact seeks to inspire media and entertainment companies around the world to leverage their resources and creative talent to advance the Goals.
- Regular monitoring and review meetings will gauge engagement.
- The Compact is an initiative of the United Nations, in collaboration with the UN Foundation.

Significance

- SDG Media Compact is an alliance of news and entertainment media and it is committing to work with the United Nations to foster public discourse and spur action
- The SDG Media Compact is inclusive and aims to embrace media companies from all regions and all platforms.
- Participating organizations will have the opportunity to create content partnerships with the United Nations, whereby the organization will increase its efforts to source and share high-value media content and newsworthy opportunities relating to the SDGs.

Human Capital Rankings

Context

- India has moved from a rank of 162 in 1990 to 158 in the latest human capital study titled, "Measuring human capital: A systematic analysis of 195 countries and territories, 1990–2016", conducted by Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME)

Details

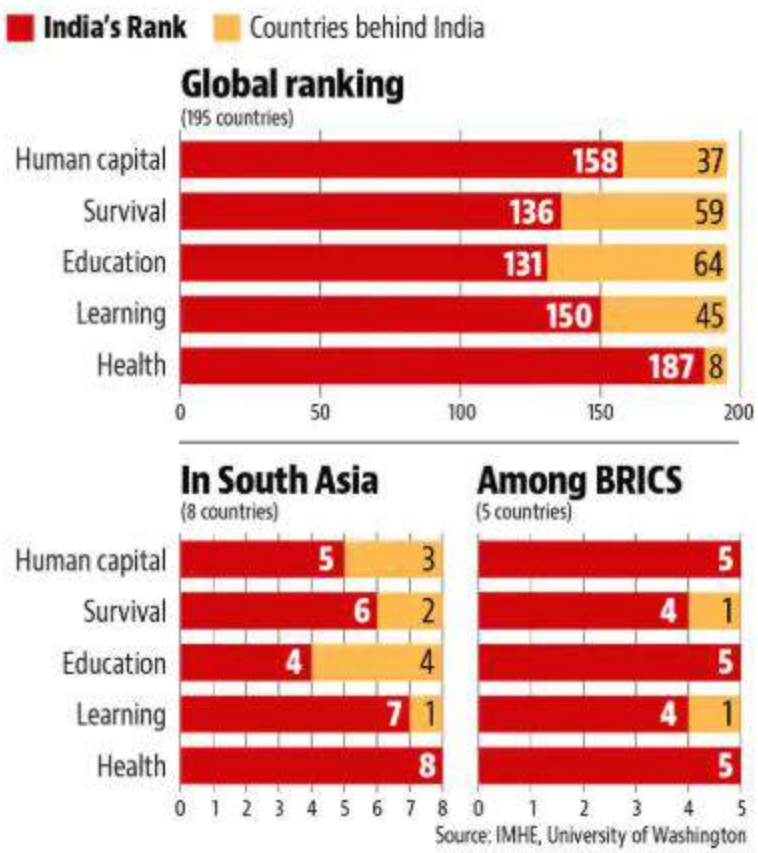
- Touted as the first ever scientific study of this nature, it ranked India at 158 of 195 countries and territories analysed using data from numerous sources, including government agencies, schools, and health care systems and over a 26 year period between 1990 and 2016.
- The rankings are based on four key parameters: life expectancy, years of schooling, learning and functional health.
- Each of these parameters is based on different indices.
    - For example, one of the factors on which learning ranks are based is performance on international student assessment standards.
    - Similarly, health rankings are based on seven indicators – wasting, stunting, anaemia, cognitive impairment, vision loss, hearing loss and incidence of certain infectious diseases.

Why are these rankings important?

- The study claims that these rankings give us an idea about the number of years a worker can be expected to work at peak productivity levels between the ages of 20 and 64 years.
- The global average on this count is 13.6 years. For India this value is just 6.5 years, around one-third the value of China (20 years).

Other Countries Ranking

- The study included the ranking of United States at 27, down from its earlier ranking at 6 in similar comparative studies, while China was pegged at 44 and Pakistan at 164
- Finland topped the study, while Turkey showed the most dramatic increase in human capital. Asian countries that showed an improvement in the period included China, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.



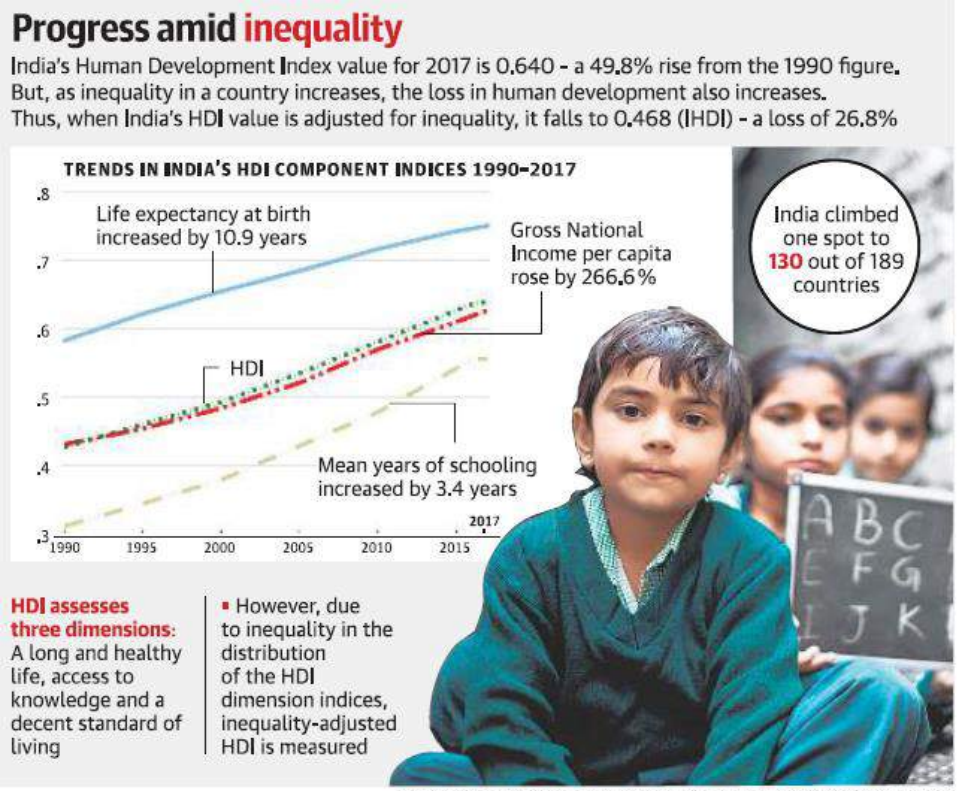
Human Development Index (HDI)

Context

- HDI was released by the United Nations Development Programme with the findings indicating a glaring inequality in the country though "millions have been lifted out of poverty".

Details

- The HDI is the composite measure of every country's attainment in three basic dimensions:
  - Standard Of Living measured by the gross national income (GNI) per capita
  - Health measured by the life expectancy at birth
  - Education levels calculated by mean years of education among the adult population and the expected years of schooling for children.



Source: United Nations Development Programme, 2018 Statistical Update

SINCE 1990, THE STEADY CLIMB

	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2011)*	HDI value
1990	57.9	7.6	3.0	1733	0.427
1995	60.4	8.2	3.5	2015	0.46
2000	62.6	8.3	4.4	2470	0.493
2005	64.6	9.7	4.8	3157	0.535
2010	66.6	10.8	5.4	4357	0.581
2015	68.3	12.0	6.3	5691	0.627
2016	68.6	12.3	6.4	6026	0.636
2017	68.8	12.3	6.4	6353	0.64

Note: PPP in $

Stats with reference to India

- India ranks a low 130 out of 189 countries
- The UNDP report stated that with an HDI value of 0.64 compared to 2017's 0.636, India is categorized as a medium human development and that its rank rose one spot compared to the 2017 HDI.
- According to the 2018 findings, between 1990 and 2017, India's HDI value increased from 0.427 to 0.640, an almost 50 per cent increase, which is an indicator that millions have been lifted out of poverty.
- At the same time, in what signals the glaring inequality in the country, the HDI value declines by more than a fourth when adjusted for inequality.
    - The value of India's Inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) falls to 0.468, a 26.8 per cent decrease, far worse than the global average decrease in the global HDI value due to inequality at 20 per cent.

In reference to Women Empowerment

- The report notes that in India women hold only 11.6 per cent of parliamentary seats
- Only 39 per cent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education as compared to 64 per cent men.
- India's worst performance on the gender scale is with regards to its female participation in the labour market which is 27.2 per cent compared to 78.8 per cent for men even as globally 49 per cent women are part of the labour force as compared to 75 per cent men.
- India performs better than its neighbors Bangladesh and Pakistan, ranking 127 out 160 countries on the Gender Inequality Index

Other Countries

- Norway at 0.95 has been ranked the highest on the HDI scale
    - Followed by Switzerland, Australia, Ireland and Germany
- Niger is the bottom at 0.35.
    - Central African Republic, South Sudan, Chad and Burundi have the lowest scores
- The greatest increase in HDI rank over the last five years is by Ireland
    - This is followed by Turkey
- The worst decline was seen in conflict-hit countries of Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

India International Convention and Expo Centre

- It is Located in Dwarka New Delhi
- The Centre would be a world-class state-of-the-art Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre, with facilities like financial, hospitality and retail services.
- The project is implemented by India International Convention & Exhibition Centre Limited
- It is a 100% Government owned company under Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Indian Ports Association appoints Managed Service Provider

Context

- As part of its efforts to promote Ease of doing Business through digital transformation and build a world class port infrastructure in the country, the Indian Ports Association (IPA) has appointed M/s Tech Mahindra as the Managed Service Provider for the five major ports at Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Deendayal Port and Paradip Port Trust.

Details

- This initiative is a major step towards integrating the maritime sector and fostering growth and development of major public sector ports in the country.
- It is a collaborative effort towards building a common shared platform for modernization and automation of port processes

The key benefits from the system in Port and Shipping sector include:

- Improve India's ranking in Ease of doing business
- Enable faster request processing in delivery of services with better turnaround time
- Reduction in manual intervention/documentation required
- Reduction in overall Transaction time and costs

- Improve the efficiency of port operations, quick turn round of vessel and subsequent less dwell time
- Dashboard to ports/MOS for Real Time MIS on cargo/ship movements & Exim transactions
- Simplified and accelerated procedures for cargo entry, exit or transit
- Enhanced transparency across systems

India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)

- It is a Government of India owned payments bank operating under the Department of Posts, Ministry of Communication, which aims to utilize all of India's 155,015 post offices as access points and 300,000 postal service workers to provide house to house banking services
- The primary rationale behind the public payments bank idea is to help in the government's goal of achieving financial inclusion by providing savings, remittance, and payments services to the rural and unorganized sectors of the economy
- India Post Payments Bank has been incorporated as a public sector company under the department of posts, with 100% government equity and is governed by the Reserve Bank of India.

What services will India Post Payments Bank offer?

- India Post Payments Bank will offer a range of products—savings and current accounts, money transfer, direct benefit transfer, bill and utility payments, enterprise and merchant payments.
- Customers will be able to access all products and services across various channels—over-the-counter services, micro ATM, mobile banking app, text messages, phone calls.
- The payments bank will also provide access to third-party financial services such as insurance, mutual funds, pension, credit products and forex.

Is India Post Payments Bank different from traditional banks?

A payments bank is a differentiated bank, offering a limited range of products.

- It can accept deposits of up to ₹ 1 lakh per customer.
- Unlike traditional banks, it cannot issue loans and credit cards.
- It will provide doorstep banking facility at a charge of ₹15-35 per transaction. The limit for doorstep banking is ₹ 10,000.
- India Post Payments Bank will offer three types of savings accounts—regular, digital and basic—at an interest rate of 4% per annum.

How will it promote rural banking?

- India Post Payments Bank will deploy around 300,000 postmen, gramin dak sewaks with cell phones and biometric devices to offer doorstep banking, mainly in rural areas.
- By December, all 155,000 post offices may be linked to the IPPB system.

Challenges

- Would these banks be able to earn the profits required to survive as a standalone business entity?
- The Reserve Bank of India has imposed restrictions on how payments banks in general can employ their funds. With lack of independence to function the profit that can be generated is questionable
- The first wave of new payments banks like Airtel, Paytm and Fino — have not exactly set the market on fire
- The IPPB promises to pay an interest rate of 4% to its savings account customers.

- To generate revenues, it plans to charge fees on money transfers and other financial services while investing idle customer deposits in safe government securities in order to earn interest.
- Whether this will be sufficient to cover interest and operational costs remains to be seen

- The IPPB is also likely to face stiff competition from private companies, which are generally more nimble in adapting to business realities and far more customer-friendly compared to the government-owned.
  - And with increasing competition, the IPPB's revenues and margins are also likely to come under pressure

Conclusion

- The bank with restrictions if it succeeds the new payments bank could usher in a new era of rapid financial inclusion across rural India.

Izmir International Tradeshow

Context

- India is the Partner Country in the 87th Izmir International tradeshow which will be hosted in Turkey
- The 87th Izmir International tradeshow will be held in Izmir – the third most populous city in Turkey, after Istanbul and Ankara

'Source India'

- In this tradeshow India will also be launching a mega business pavilion 'Source India' hosting 75 Indian companies with the aim of tie-ups in order to increase India's exports to Turkey and other neighboring countries.
- This is part of a series of Source India pavilions that the Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) is hosting in important tradeshows across the world for boosting India's exports.
- TPCI is the trade and investment promotion organization of the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce &Industry and works to open new areas for co-operation in trade and investment between India and rest of the world.

Jan Dhan Darshak

Context

- Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance and National Informatics Centre (NIC) has jointly developed a mobile app called Jan Dhan Darshak as a part of financial inclusion (FI) initiative

Salient features of this App are as follows:

- It will act as a guide for the common people in locating a financial service touch point at a given location in the country.
- Find nearby Financial touch points, based on current location (Branches/ATM/Post offices)
- Search by place name
- Search by place name also available with Voice Interface
- Phone number of bank branches available in app, with the facility of call button for integrated dialing
- Users' feedback will go directly to the concerned bank for carrying out the necessary updation in data on financial touch points.

Jhum Cultivation

Context

- Niti Aayog has called for a mission mode approach for transforming shifting cultivation and it has also recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture should take up a "mission on shifting cultivation" to ensure inter-ministerial convergence.
- This was in reference to the report titled, "Mission on shifting cultivation: towards a transformational approach".

Introduction

- Shifting cultivation also referred to as jhum cultivation, is considered as an important mainstay of food production for a considerable population in northeast India in States like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur.

Details

- The publication notes that between 2000 and 2010, the land under shifting cultivation dropped by 70 %.
- The report quotes data of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education published in Statistical Year Book-2014 by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, which points out that from 35,142 sq km in 2000, the area under jhum cultivation dropped to 10,306 sq km in 2010.
- The Wastelands Atlas Map shows a reduction in shifting cultivation in north-eastern States from 16,435.18 sq km to 8,771.62 sq km in two years.
- MGNREGA has also had an impact on reducing dependency of people on shifting cultivation

Concerns Raised in the report

- Central as well as State government departments of forests and environment, agriculture and allied departments often have divergent approaches towards shifting cultivation.
    - This creates confusion among grass-roots level workers and jhum farmers
- The practice ensures food security it does not provide adequate cash for the families.
- Earlier the cultivators returned to fallows after 10-12 years, now they are returning in three to five years. This has impact on the quality of the soil.

Recommendations

- The document calls for policy coherence.
    - It said land for shifting cultivation should be recognized as "agricultural land" where farmers practise agro-forestry for the production of food rather than as forestland.
- The publication suggested that shifting cultivation fallows must be legally perceived and categorized as 'regenerating fallows' and that credit facilities be extended to those who practice shifting cultivation.
- The publication also addresses the issue of food and nutritional security of communities involved in jhum cultivation during transition and transformation by broadening the public distribution system (PDS) to ensure widespread access to cereals and other basic food items.
    - This can be done by enlisting well-established and well-performing SHG cluster federations already established in several of the NE States

Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF)

- It is caused a by virus transmitted from pregnant or recently-lambed sheep or goats to cattle
- It is originally from South Africa that affecting cattle
- It has neither a cure nor a vaccination that can prevent its spread.

Symptoms

- Affected cattle are profoundly depressed with a high fever (40.5-42.0°C).
- There is a complete loss of appetite and the eyes are severely affected with corneal opacity causing blindness.
- Affected cattle avoid bright light and sudden exposure to sunlight causes the eyelids to close
- There is copious mucopurulent nasal discharge
- Affected animals may become very sensitive to touch especially around the head and may become very aggressive and charge at attendants.

Merger of Dena Bank, Vijaya Bank and Bank of Baroda

Context

- The Centre proposed the unification of state-owned Bank of Baroda, Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank to create India's third largest bank with a total business of more than ₹14.82 trillion as parts of reforms in the public sector banking segment.

Alternative Mechanism

- It will oversee proposals of amalgamation of public sector banks.
- After getting in-principle approval, the banks will take steps in accordance with the law and SEBI requirements.
- The final scheme will be notified by the Central government in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India
- The alternative mechanism will include a panel of ministers, whose members will be decided by the Prime Minister.
- The merger will be based purely on commercial considerations.

Background

- The proposal of fewer but stronger state-run lenders was originally mooted in 1991
- Narasimhan report on banking reforms had recommended merger of public sector banks to make them stronger
- It had envisaged a three-tier banking structure with three large banks with international presence at the top, eight to 10 national banks at tier two, and a large number of regional and local banks at the bottom.

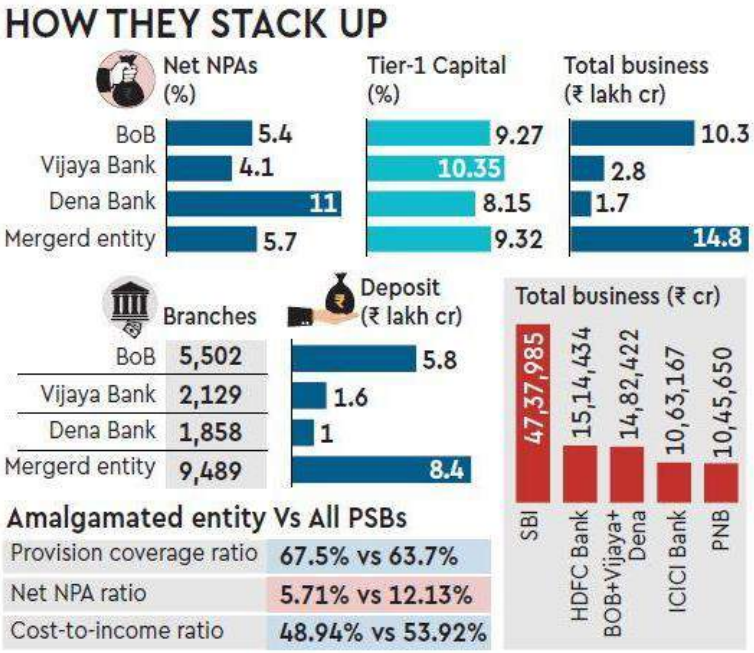
Procedure for merger

- Under the Bank Nationalization Act 1969, there are provisions allowing such mergers. However, such decisions must be approved by Parliament.
- Section 44A of Banking Regulation Act 1949 lays down the norms for voluntary mergers and "forced" mergers are done under Section 45 of the Act.

Details

- The merged entity, comprising two relatively stronger banks and a weak one, will be the third-largest lender in India after State Bank of India and HDFC Bank Ltd
- One of the core reasons behind the choice of these banks was perhaps the fact that all three use the same core banking system—Finacle from Infosys—making the task of merging the technology platforms and back-ends relatively easier.

- The government has also moved to offload its majority stake in IDBI Bank to Life Insurance Corporation of India.
- No employee will face any adverse service conditions after the amalgamation



Why was the decision taken?

- India aspiring to be the fastest growing economy has to be supported by stronger and globally competitive banks with increased choices to the stakeholders.
- Dena Bank has been placed under the prompt corrective action framework (It is in a bad shape with higher NPAs, higher cost to income and falling profitability).
    - So the idea is to merge the weaker bank with stronger bank (BoB and Vijaya Bank) so that it would be a strong competitive bank with economies of scale.
    - The entity would also be positioned for substantial rise in customer base, market reach and operational efficiency.
- The amalgamation is aimed at catering the massive credit requirements of the growing economy, and cutting costs as well as dependence on the government for capital infusion in the longer term.
- Therefore the merger is part of the government's efforts to consolidate the banking industry with an eye on overcoming the bad loan crisis.

What else can the Govt consider while apart from weak strong banking?

- Merger Based on Geography
    - Corporation Bank and Canara Bank are known for a better network in the South while Punjab National Bank is more prominent in the North.
    - Merger of banks based on geography will result in lesser disruption in terms of rationalization of branches and people.
- Merger to Create Niche Banks

- In a new emerging banking model, there are already niche players like payment banks (retail payments), Small Finance Banks (doing micro loans), full scale banks (Axis or an HDFC Bank) and universal banks (ICICI Bank or a Kotak Bank).
- There is a space for creating certain niche entities like an SME focused bank or an MSME focused bank.
- This can be achieved by merging few PSBS with a new mandate to cover a particular sector.

Similar Steps taken in the past

- The Government had taken comparable step with the merger of the five associate banks of SBI.
- The merger had resulted in a sharp jump in the combined entity's bad loans portfolio, crimping its profit.

Merits

- It is expected to reduce the amount of capital it needs to pump into these lenders and help clean their balance sheets.
- Bank mergers helps institution scale up quickly and gain a large number of new customers instantly. Not only does an acquisition give your bank more capital to work with when it comes to lending and investments, but it also provides a broader geographic footprint in which to operate
- Banks benefit from a merger or acquisition because of the increase in talent at leadership's disposal

Demerits

- There is no evidence that merger of banks would strengthen the banks or make it more efficient.
- Earlier examples also show that it could result in closure of branches, increase in bad loans, reduction of staff, reduction in business
- One of the biggest challenges for the merger is likely to be human resources management
  - Even though they are public sector banks, each one have different culture. The approach and attitude is not to change quickly
- Weaker banks when merged with stronger ones will tend to be a drag on their operations
- They are unlikely to solve the bad loan crisis that has gripped the banking system as a whole.
- It is important to ensure that such mergers do not end up creating an entity that is weaker than the original pre-merger strong bank.
- From a corporate governance perspective, however, the merger sends out rather poor signals.
  - The dominant shareholder in the form of the government is dictating critical moves that impact the minority shareholders, who are left with no say in the matter.

Way forward

- There is no denying the fact that there are too many public sector banks in India; given this, consolidation is a good idea in principle. But ideally, mergers ought to be between strong banks
- However Merger fallout should be managed prudently; identifying synergies and exploiting scale efficiencies
- A merger as significant as this one ought to have been first discussed and approved in the board rooms of the banks concerned. So considering the views of all stakeholders is a must in the future for better governance.

Move Global Mobility Summit

- This Summit will help drive Government's goals for vehicle electrification, renewable energy integration and job growth and also speed up India's transition to a clean energy economy.
- It aims to bring together stakeholders from across the sectors of mobility and transportation to co-create a public interest framework to revolutionize transport.
    - The summit also aims to set the base for a transport system which is safe, clean, shared and connected, affordable, accessible and inclusive.
- It will feature global political leaders from mobility space and will see the participation of over 2200 participants from across the world including government leadership, research organizations, academia, industry leaders, think tanks and civil society organizations

The summit will deliberate on five themes:

- Maximizing asset utilization and services
- Comprehensive electrification and alternative fuels
- Reinventing public transport
- Goods transport and logistics
- Data analytics and mobility

The Summit will constitute three designated components – The Conclave, the Expo and the Featured Events.

- The Conclave would include panel discussions featuring global CEOs and transport ministers from across the world.
    - It will also see participation from countries like Netherlands, Slovakia, USA, UK, Netherlands, China, South Korea, Australia etc.
    - Special Track sessions with Mayors and Governors from various major cities and capitals are also planned to highlight their experiences with future mobility and evolve development paradigms for India.
- 'MOVEMENTUM', the Expo will feature exciting future technologies and cutting edge innovations which will shape the mobility paradigm, showcasing India's push towards transformative mobility solutions.
- Featured Events such as Breakout sessions, Fireside chats, and Innovation spotlights, Hackathons, Mobility Pitch Competitions and Networking Sessions.
    - These are planned in collaboration with industry sponsors and partners offering informal insights into what constitute transformative mobility.

Context

- In the Global Mobility Summit held in Delhi Prime Minister Narendra Modi said "Safe, Adequate, Holistic Infrastructure or SAHI" should the future of mobility be for India

Agglomeration Economics

- Even as one may hope for uniform spread of prosperity across urban and rural India, experience over the past century reveals that per-capita income in a nation spurts when more than half its population is urban.
- Pundits attribute this to agglomeration economics, whereby, boosted by access to a wider range of opportunities, "people in cities are more productive, more innovative, and have higher skills".
- In other words, apart from increased personal mobility, we also need to anticipate faster urbanization as our economic growth accelerates.

- Agglomeration economies are the benefits that come when firms and people locate near one another together in cities and industrial clusters.
    - These benefits all ultimately come from transport costs savings: the only real difference between a nearby firm and one across the continent is that it is easier to connect with a neighbor.

In other words, apart from increased personal mobility, we also need to anticipate faster urbanization as our economic growth accelerates. As this densification accelerates, we need to urgently address the questions: How should cities order their urban form? What does that mean for the kind of mobility solutions they need to put in place? Urban form and mobility architectures have a symbiotic relationship.

To address these questions the summit was held in New Delhi.

Details

- Road transport accounts for one-fifth of global CO2 emissions. This threatens to choke cities and raise global temperatures. Public transport must be the cornerstone of our mobility initiatives
- Mr. Modi elaborated on his '7Cs' for the future of mobility: it stands for common, connected, convenient, congestion-free, charged, clean and cutting-edge.

Niti Aayog Report

- 'Transforming India's Mobility: A Perspective' prepared by the NITI Aayog and Boston Consulting Group (BCG) calls for efficient and convenient public transport to answer the twin problems of pollution and congestion.
    - The number of motor vehicles in India has grown 40-fold in 44 years, from 1981 to 2015, the NITI Aayog-BCG report says.
- The reason: absence of a public transport system, leading to a rapid rise in private vehicle ownership.
- The four big metros in the country lose "over $22 billion annually," on congestion, the report said.

NRI Bonds to rescue the rupee

What are NRI bonds?

- These are bonds issued by the Reserve Bank of India to non-resident Indians who are interested in investing their money in India.
- Since these bonds offer higher returns than other similar investments, they can be used as a tool to attract capital during times when other domestic assets fail to attract the interest of foreign investors.
- Many investors view them as a safe investment as these bonds are issued by the Indian central bank.

Why are they in the news?

- The sharp slide in the value of the rupee has led to speculation that the RBI might opt to issue NRI bonds worth $30-35 billion in order to help attract dollar investment into the country.
- The rupee's fall of 13.7% since the beginning of the year has been caused by two factors.
    - On the one hand, capital has been moving out of India's capital markets. Foreign portfolio investors pulled out ₹47,836 crore in the first half of the year, a 10-year high.
    - On the other, Indian exports have been losing demand, while imports of commodities like crude oil have risen significantly.
- India's current account deficit hit a five-year high in July. Both these factors have combined to cause an increase in the demand for the dollar, thus leading to the fall in the value of the rupee.

Examples from the past

- In 2013, when the rupee witnessed a fall of about 25% in just four months following the U.S. Federal Reserve's decision to taper down its bond-purchase programme, the RBI was able to collect more than $30 billion worth of foreign capital.
- NRI bonds were also issued in 1998 and 2000 to help curb the slide of the rupee.

Can bonds save the rupee?

- NRI bonds could theoretically help increase demand for the rupee and stabilize its value against the dollar.
- The actual effect of these bonds on the rupee, however, will depend on how attractive they are to NRIs.
- While these bonds can provide temporary assistance to the rupee by encouraging capital inflows into the economy, they may not address the fundamental economic issues that are causing the fall of the rupee.

Conclusion

- Until the RBI can rein in domestic inflation and the government can take steps to boost exports and curb imports, emergency measures like the issuance of NRI bonds can only offer temporary respite to the rupee.

Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA)

Context

- The umbrella policy — Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) — was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs to ensure that farmers growing oilseeds, pulses and copra actually get the minimum support prices

Three components

The new scheme has three components — Price Support Scheme (PSS), Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS), and Pilot of Private Procurement & Stockist Scheme (PPPS).

Price Support Scheme (PSS)

- It is physical procurement of pulses, oilseeds and Copra will be done by Central Nodal Agencies with proactive role of State governments.
- It is also decided that in addition to NAFED, Food Cooperation of India (FCI) will take up PSS operations in states /districts.
- The procurement expenditure and losses due to procurement will be borne by Central Government as per norms.

Price Deficiency Payment Scheme this scheme (PDPS)

- It is proposed to cover all oilseeds for which MSP is notified.
- In this direct payment of the difference between the MSP and the selling/modal price will be made to pre-registered farmers selling his produce in the notified market yard through a transparent auction process.
- All payment will be done directly into registered bank account of the farmer.

- This scheme does not involve any physical procurement of crops as farmers are paid the difference between the MSP price and Sale/modal price on disposal in notified market.
- The support of central government for PDPS will be given as per norms.

The other existing schemes of Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) for procurement of paddy, wheat and nutri-cereals/coarse grains and of Ministry of Textile for cotton and jute will be continued for providing MSP to farmers for these crops.

Challenges

- Government should focus on building that infrastructure especially in the eastern States for procurement
- Support will continue for pulses and copra, while private procurement of oilseeds has been introduced.
    - earlier experiments with private procurement — such as the ITC e-choupal scheme — had collapsed

Painted rails set to counter corrosion

Context

- The Railways is looking into the feasibility of introducing painted rails to overcome corrosion, which has been a perennial problem in maintaining the health of rails at desired standards.

Stats

- In States like Kerala, rails typically have a life of only about 15 years, as compared with 40 years in the railway networks of other States
- This is mainly due to the two monsoons in the State, fluctuations in temperature, and water-logging.

Significance

- Painted rails will give more life compared with conventional rails
- the Railways will be able to avoid the premature renewal required due to the corrosion of rails and save crores of rupees

Pakyong Airport

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated the Pakyong Airport in Sikkim.
- It is located around 60 km from the India-China border.
- The first airport in the Himalayan State, and the 100th airport in the country.
- Pakyong Airport would greatly ease connectivity to Sikkim and in order to ensure that it is useful to the common man, this airport is part of the UDAN scheme.
- The airport's 1.75-km runway has a width of 30 metre. It has a 116-metre-long taxiway connecting it to an apron measuring 106 metre by 76 metre that can simultaneously accommodate two ATR-72 aircraft. Another 75-metre stretch adjacent to the main runway is being constructed for the use of the Indian Air Force.
- The airport that has a 3,000 sq metre terminal building has a capacity to handle 50 in-bound and as many out-bound passengers.

Psbloansin59minutes.com

Context

- Finance Minister launched the web portal www.psbloansin59minutes.com, which is a Transformative initiative in MSME credit space, which will enable in principle approval for MSME loans up to Rs. 1 crore within 59 minutes from SIDBI and 5 Public Sector Banks (PSBs)

Details

- It is a strategic initiative of SIBDI led PSB consortium incubated under the aegis of Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance
- The Portal sets a new benchmark in loan processing and reduces the turnaround time from 20-25 days to 59 minutes. Subsequent to this in principle approval, the loan will be disbursed in 7-8 working days.

Use of technology to enable this move

- A User Friendly Platform has been built where MSME borrower is not required to submit any physical document for in-principle approval.
- The solution uses sophisticated algorithms to read and analyse data points from various sources such as IT returns, GST data, bank statements, MCA21 etc. in less than an hour while capturing the applicant's basic details using Smart analytics from available documents.
- The system simplifies the decision making process for a loan officer as the final output provides a summary of credit, valuation and verification on a user-friendly dashboard in real time.

Public Credit Registry

Context:

RBI Deputy Governor made a case for setting up a Public Credit Registry (PCR), incorporating unique identifiers: Aadhaar for individual borrowers and Corporate Identification Number for firms.

What is PCR?

- A public credit registry is an information repository that collates all loan information of individuals and corporate borrowers.

Why do we need PCR?

Credit information is now available across multiple systems in bits and pieces and not in one window. Data on borrowings from banks, non-banking financial companies, corporate bonds or debentures from the market, external commercial borrowings (ECBs), foreign currency convertible bonds (FCCBs), masala bonds, and inter-corporate borrowings are not available in one data repository.

- PCR will help capture all relevant information about a borrower, across different borrowing products in one place.
- It can flag early warnings on asset quality by tracking performance on other credits.
- A credit repository helps banks distinguish between a bad and a good borrower and accordingly offer attractive interest rates to good borrowers and higher interest rates to bad borrowers.
- The move is based on the recommendations of a committee, headed by Y.M. Deosthalee.
- PCR will address issues such as information asymmetry, improve access to credit and strengthen the credit culture among consumers.
- It can also address the bad loan problem staring at banks, as corporate debtors will not be able to borrow across banks without disclosing existing debt.
- A PCR may also help raise India's rank in the global ease of doing business index.
- Setting up the PCR will help improve India's rankings in the World Bank's ease of doing business index.

- Access to credit information, including debt details and repayment history would drive innovation in lending. For example, currently most banks focus on large companies for loans and consequently the micro, small and medium enterprises are left with limited options for borrowing. With satisfactory payment history and validated debt details made available, it will increase the credit availability to micro, small and medium enterprises along with deepening of the financial markets.
- This will support the policy of financial inclusion.

Panel's proposals:

- The committee has suggested the registry should capture all loan information and borrowers be able to access their own history.
- Data is to be made available to stakeholders such as banks, on a need-to-know basis.
- Data privacy will be protected.

PCR in other countries:

PCR in other countries now include other transactional data such as payments to utilities like power and telecom for retail consumers and trade credit data for businesses. Regularity in making payments to utilities and trade creditors provides an indication of the credit quality of such customers.

Raghuram Rajan says Small loans could turn bad

Context

- Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan has cautioned that the next crisis in India's banking sector could come from loans given to the unorganized micro and small businesses, called MUDRA loans, and credit extended through the Kisan credit card.

Details

- A larger number of bad loans were originated in the period 2006-2008 when economic growth was strong, and previous infrastructure projects such as power plants had been completed on time and within budget
- Taking into picture the past the banks become optimistic that they extrapolate past growth and performance to the future. So they are willing to accept higher leverage in projects, and less promoter equity.
- sometimes banks signed up to lend based on project reports by the promoter's investment bank, without doing their own due diligence

Current Scenario

- Mr. Rajan has flagged three major sources of potential trouble:
    - Mudra credit, which is basically small-ticket loans granted to micro and small enterprises;
    - lending to farmers through Kisan Credit Cards;
    - contingent liabilities under the Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs, run by the Small Industries Development Bank of India

Concern

- These loans have been sanctioned under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, which aims to 'fund the unfunded'.

- Given that these are small loans up to ₹10 lakh each, with the borrowers mostly from the informal sector, banks have to monitor them very closely.
- It is debatable whether banks have the resources and manpower to do this when they are chasing the bigger borrowers for business and, increasingly these days, recoveries.
- The risk is that these small-ticket loans will drop under the radar and build into a large credit issue in course of time. The same logic holds true for crop loans made through Kisan Credit Cards.

Recommendations

- In a note on bank non-performing assets (NPAs) prepared at the request of Murli Manohar Joshi, Chairman of the Parliament Estimates Committee, Dr. Rajan said the government should refrain from setting ambitious credit targets or from waiving loans.
- professionalizing bank boards with appointments done by an independent Banks Board Bureau;
- inducting talent from outside banks to make up for the deficit within;
- revising compensation structures to attract the best talent; and
- Ensuring that banks are not left without a leader at the top.

Conclusion

- Mr. Rajan has raised many important issues that could destabilize the entire economy but political parties have chosen to pick only the points that are convenient to them
- A strong political will moving away from blame games is the need of the hour to stop the rising tide.

Rubber

- Rubber tree is a quick growing tall tree acquiring 20-30 meter height. It begins to yield latex in 5-7 years after planting.
- It requires hot and humid climate with temperature of 25°-35°C and annual rainfall of over 200 cm. The rainfall should be well distributed throughout the year.

Production in India

- Almost entire rubber is produced in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
    - Kerala is the largest producer of natural rubber producing 595 thousand tonnes or 92 per cent of total rubber production of India

Global Production

- Association of Natural Rubber Producing Countries (ANRPC) shows India is in fifth spot in production, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, China and India.
- India was at the fourth place in 2012 after Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.
- A couple of years ago, India was third in production after Thailand and Indonesia. It saw a serious fall during 2008-13, leading to a serious supply crunch in the local markets.

Problems of rubber Industry

- The trade policy reforms initiated since 1991-92 and the consequent exposure to foreign competition has reduced the profits
- The volatility of NR prices and the fluctuations in farm income have hit the conventional farm management practices

- The poor return and high labour cost has forced many of the growers, 75 per cent small and marginal farmers, to keep away from tapping
- The scarcity of tappers and high level of absenteeism, diversion of farmland to other non-farm activities, and the depleting size of holdings are other factors behind the decline in production.
- The tyre industry consumes 65-70 per cent of the rubber produced in the country. The unrestricted massive imports by tyre companies have also pushed down domestic demand
- Rubber industry, dominated by around 6,000 micro, small and medium sized manufacturing units, is facing a twin challenge of inverted duty structure and FTAs signed by India that led to rise in cheap import of finished rubber goods

Rubber Board

- It is a statutory body constituted by the Government of India, under the Rubber Act 1947, for the overall development of the rubber industry in the country

It shall also be the duty of the Board:

- To advise the Central Government on all matters relating to the development of the rubber industry, including the import and export of rubber.
- To advise the Central Government with regard to participation in any international conference or scheme relating to rubber.

National Rubber Policy (NRP)

- It will address various issues concerning the sector with a view to boost shipment and productivity
- A task force comprising representatives of state and central governments has been constituted for suggesting short term-solutions and long-term strategies to address the issues
- Major issues related to the sector include minimum support price for natural rubber, restriction on import, minimum import price, categorization of natural rubber as an agricultural product, import of cup lumps, safeguard duty and increase in budget allocation to Rubber Board.

Sadarmatt anicut and and Pedda Cheruvu get Heritage tag

Context

- A meeting of the International Executive Council, the highest decision making body of International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), at Saskatoon in Canada has accepted Telangana government's nomination of Sadarmatt anicut across river Godavari in Nirmal district and Pedda Cheruvu in Kamareddy district in the ICID Register of Heritage Irrigation Structures.

International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID)

- It was established in 1950 is a leading scientific, technical, international not-for-profit, Non-Governmental Organization.
- ICID is a professional network of experts from across the world in the field of irrigation, drainage, and flood management.
- The main mission is to promote 'Sustainable agriculture water management' to achieve 'Water secure world free of poverty and hunger through sustainable rural development'
- ICID is a knowledge sharing platform dedicated to issues that covers the entire spectrum of agricultural water management practices ranging from rainfed agriculture to supplemental irrigation, land drainage, deficit irrigation to full irrigation, etc.
- In addition, drainage of agricultural lands forms the core theme of commission's activities.

- Floods and drought; the two extremes of increasingly variable climate as a result of potential climate change, also form the focus of activities.

Heritage Irrigation Structure

- It is a process for recognition of the historical irrigation structures on the lines of World Heritage Sites as recognized by UNESCO.
- objectives
    - Tracing the history of and understanding the evolution of irrigation in the civilizations across the world.
    - To learn the philosophy and wisdom on sustainable irrigation from these structures
    - To protect/preserve these historical irrigation structures
- criteria
    - The structure shall be more than 100 years old;
    - Dams (operational largely for irrigation purpose),
    - Water storage structures such as tanks,
    - Canal System

Benefits

- Understanding of the factors that make the heritage structures sustainable and learn lessons there from;
- Education opportunity for professionals, students and general public;
- Drawing attention of the concerned governments to provide sufficient resources to maintain the HISs.

Sadarmatt Anicut

- This irrigation facility which has provided precious water for paddy crops in its designed ayacut of 13,100 acres in present day Khanapur and Kadem mandals since its construction in 1891-92.
- The anicut, which is English word for Telugu's ana-katta, meaning a rainfall bund, was built by Nawab Ikbal-ud-Dowla who bore the tile of Vicar-ul-Umrah Bahadur in 1891-92 about 50 km downstream of the Sri Ram Sagar Project (SRSP) and is chiefly fed by Sawrnavagu stream after the construction of SRSP. C.E. Wilkinson was the Taluqdar then and J.J.
- Sadarmatt bund is 437.4 m long on its left flank and 23.8 m on its right flank. The left canal is 21.5 km long while the right canal is 10 km and the distributory is 12 km in length irrigating 5,700 acres, 3,400 acres and 4,000 acres respectively.

Pedda Cheruvu

- The Pedda Cheruvu (big tank in Telugu) located on the outskirts of this district headquarters town is spread over an area of 618 acres and was built in 1897 during the rule of Mir Mahaboob Ali Khan, the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad State. It has a 1.8-km-long tank bund and 145-metre weir and three sluices
- It provides water for irrigation to over 900 acres in Kamareddy, Sarampally, Narsampally and old Rajampet.
- It also provides drinking water for residents of the area.
- This tank was taken up under the second round of Mission Kakatiya to be developed as a mini tank bund with an estimated outlay of ₹ 6.6 crore.

SEBI new norms for FPIs

Background

- SEBI issued a circular for enhancing the KYC (know-your-customer) norms for Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) and asked category-II and III FPIs to provide a list of their Beneficial Owners (BOs).

Categories of FPI

As part of Risk based approach towards customer identity verification (KYC), FPIs have been categorized into three major categories:

- Category I (Low Risk) which would include Government and entities like Foreign Central banks, Sovereign wealth Funds, Multilateral Organizations, etc
- Category II (Moderate Risk) which would include Regulated entities such as banks, Pension Funds, Insurance Companies, Mutual Funds, Investment Trusts, Asset Management Companies, University related endowments (already registered with SEBI)
- Category III (High Risk) which would include all other FPIs not eligible to be included in the above two categories

Beneficial Owner (BO)

- A shareholder is a person (individual or corporate), in whose name shares in a particular offshore company are registered. So, it basically is what the name suggests – the "holder" of shares
- A Beneficial Owner is a person who enjoys the benefits of ownership even though title to some form of property is in another name.
    - It also means any individual or group of individuals who, either directly or indirectly, has the power to vote or influence the transaction decisions regarding a specific security, such as shares in a company.

Rules about BO

- The threshold for a BO in a partnership firm or trust is 15% and 25% in the case of companies.
- The threshold is further reduced to 10% if the fund is incorporated in a high-risk nations with a history of money-laundering and terrorism, etc.
- In case no single entity meets these thresholds, then a senior managing official of the FPI is the designated BO.
- SEBI had said that if the BO exercises control through means like voting rights, agreements and arrangement that should also be specified. Such BOs, it added, should not be from jurisdictions that are combating financing of terrorism deficiencies to which counter measures apply or those that have not made sufficient progress in addressing these deficiencies.

Details

- The circular read Resident Indians (RIs), Non Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OICs) cannot be beneficial owner of a fund investing in India.
- The company majority owned by NRIs or PIOs will not be allowed to invest as a foreign portfolio investor (FPI) in the country.
- Sebi has directed that such funds should either be closed or the ownership structure changed by the end of December.

Conditions

- NRIs and OCIs can only obtain an FPI licence on condition that they limit their roles to investment advisors and do not invest their money.
- The regulator had asked Category II and III FPIs to disclose the name and address of the BOs, their tax residency jurisdiction along with percentage shareholding capital or profit ownership in the FPIs.
- Category II FPIs largely include regulated institutions, persons, broad-based funds and university, pension and endowment funds.

What was SEBI's motive?

- Though the regulator has not explicitly stated the reason, concerns over money-laundering and round tripping may have prompted this directive.

Why are they unhappy?

- FPIs are currently allowed to invest up to 10% in a listed Indian company.
    - SEBI has now said that their investment limit will be clubbed if they have the same BO.
- Secondly, as of now, economic ownership has been the basic criteria for determining the BO of an offshore fund.
    - This mean an entity owning a majority stake in a fund is considered a BO.
    - But in new circular, the regulator asked FPIs to determine ownership based on both shareholding and control.
    - In this context, control means the right to appoint and remove directors, along with other administrative rights.
    - India-origin fund managers don't own any controlling stakes in the funds they run but are in control. Hence, the structure becomes impermissible in accordance with the new circular.
- Thirdly, SEBI has said that high-risk nations would be subject to more rigorous KYC norms.
    - India-based investment managers have been affected since they can no longer be beneficial owners of FPIs.
    - Many investment managers, based in India, set up offshore funds to attract NRI money, control them and invest some of their own funds.

Concerns

- Foreign funds with majority holding of NRIs, PIOs, OCIs and RIs will look for alternative structures, to avoid beneficial ownership breach, or unwind their positions.

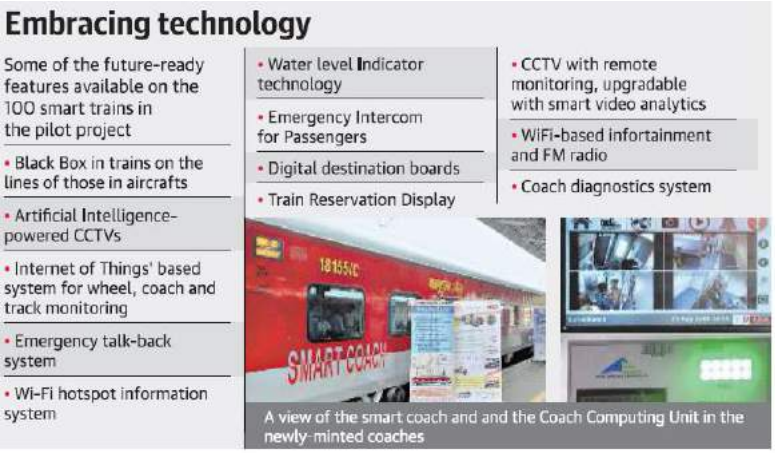
H.R. Khan Committee suggestions.

- The committee suggested that NRIs, overseas citizens of India and resident Indians should be allowed to hold non-controlling stakes in FPIs and no restriction should be imposed on them to manage non-investing FPIs or Sebi-registered offshore funds.
- NRIs will be allowed to invest as FPIs if the single holding is under 25% and group holding under 50% in a fund
- PIOs should not be subjected to any restrictions
- It also favoured doing away with additional KYC documentation requirement for beneficial owners in case of government-related FPIs.

Smart Trains

Context

- The Indian Railways are set to launch their 'Make in India' smart coaches with new features like black box and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered CCTVs, matching international standards.



Black box

- The black box, being introduced for the first time by Indian Railways, has a powerful multi-dimensional communication interface to provide information on passengers and coach condition on real-time basis.
- Unlike the black boxes in aircraft which cannot prevent accidents, the ones in smart coaches will prevent mishaps like derailments.
    - The black box would monitor the train on several parameters in real time.
    - In case of any deviation from normal, the surveillance unit would be a alerted so that maintenance schedules can be planned effectively
- The box would monitor temperature of internal wires, cables and connectors and would report deviations. This will help in checking short circuits that may cause fire.
- The black box will also improve passenger amenities by issuing alert before air conditioning system fails.
- The black box will act as a coach control unit with communication interfaces for passenger announcements, GPS-based announcement triggers, emergency intercom for commuters, digital destination boards, train reservation display modules, and CCTVs with remote monitoring.

Details

- AI-powered CCTVs will help those in the control room to keep a tab on untoward incidents and on the behaviour of on-board staff. Commuters will also be able to communicate with Railways officials.
    - Six cameras installed in the coach will provide live recording. The footage can be accessed from the control room, which will be advantageous for law enforcers.
- For wheel, coach and track monitoring, Railways have come up with Internet of things-based system.
    - The vibrating-energy-based sensors will monitor the wheels, bearing and hard spots on the track, and will provide data through GPS/GPRS to the remote server for diagnosis and remedial measures.
- The Passenger Information and Coach Computing Unit (PICCU), an industrial grade computer, will monitor the coach maintenance and passenger interface.

- An emergency talk-back system will enable communication between passengers and the guard during a crisis. A Wi-Fi hotspot information system is another innovative feature.
- Smart coaches are also laden with water-level indicator technology to know whether the water in the coach is sufficient and when it needs to be filled. An SMS will be sent to the next watering station when the water level falls below half the coach capacity.

Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT)

- It is an initiative to promote Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG) as an alternative green transport fuel
- This initiative holds great promise for efficient municipal solid waste management and in tackling the problem of polluted urban air due to farm stubble-burning and carbon emissions

Biogas

- Bio-gas is produced naturally through a process of anaerobic decomposition from waste / bio-mass sources like agriculture residue, cattle dung, sugarcane press mud, municipal solid waste, sewage treatment plant waste, etc.
- After purification, it is compressed and called CBG, which has pure methane content of over 95%. Compressed Bio-Gas is exactly similar to the commercially available natural gas in its composition and energy potential.
- With calorific value (~52,000 KJ/kg) and other properties similar to CNG, Compressed Bio-Gas can be used as an alternative, renewable automotive fuel. Given the abundance of biomass in the country, Compressed Bio-Gas has the potential to replace CNG in automotive, industrial and commercial uses in the coming years

Sources of Production

- Compressed Bio-Gas can be produced from various bio-mass/waste sources, including agricultural residue, municipal solid waste, sugarcane press mud, distillery spent wash, cattle dung and sewage treatment plant waste.
- The other waste streams, i.e, rotten potatoes from cold storages, rotten vegetables, dairy plants, chicken/poultry litter, food waste, horticulture waste, forestry residues and treated organic waste from industrial effluent treatment plants (ETPs) can be used to generate biogas.
- The potential for Compressed Bio-Gas production from various sources in India is estimated at about 62 million tonnes per annum.

There are multiple benefits from converting agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste into CBG on a commercial scale:

- Responsible waste management, reduction in carbon emissions and pollution
- Additional revenue source for farmers
- Boost to entrepreneurship, rural economy and employment
- Support to national commitments in achieving climate change goals
- Reduction in import of natural gas and crude oil
- Buffer against crude oil/gas price fluctuations

Way forward

- This significant move has the potential to boost availability of more affordable transport fuels, better use of agricultural residue, cattle dung and municipal solid waste, as well as to provide an additional revenue source to farmers.
- So, Compressed Bio-Gas networks can be integrated with city gas distribution (CGD) networks to boost supplies to domestic and retail users in existing and upcoming markets.

Unemployment among educated youth at 16%

Context

- According to State of Working India 2018 study released by Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment higher growth rates have not translated into more jobs and increase in productivity has failed to spur a commensurate rise in wages.

Details

- The study has confirmed spectre of jobless growth and has said there is divergence between growth and jobs with increase over time.
- The study uses government data to show that total employment actually shrank by seven million between 2013 and 2015, and cites private data to posit that an absolute decline has continued in the years since.
- Unemployment has risen to more than 5% overall, and the study slices the data to show that in geographic terms,
    - north Indian States are the most severely affected, while in demographic terms,
    - Young people with higher education levels suffer an unemployment rate as high as 16%.
- While wages are rising in almost all sectors, hidden within the positive data is the worrying fact that rural wage growth collapsed in 2014, and has not risen since

Manufacturing Sector

- In the organized manufacturing sector, though the number of jobs has grown, there has also been an increase in the share of contract work, which offers lower wages and less job security
- Labour productivity in the sector is six times higher than it was 30 years ago; however, managerial and supervisory salaries have only tripled in the same period, while production workers' wages have grown a measly 1.5 times.

Women's participation

- Women's participation in the paid workforce is still low, but the situation is unequal across States.
    - In Uttar Pradesh, only 20 women are in paid employment for every 100 men, while that
    - figure jumps to 50 in Tamil Nadu
    - 70 in Mizoram and Nagaland.

Caste Gap

- With regard to earnings, the caste gap is actually larger than the gender gap.
- Dalits and Adivasis are over-represented in low-paying occupations, and severely under-represented in higher-paying ones, the study reveals.
- They earn only 55-56% of upper caste workers' earnings

West Bengal where infrastructure is crumbling

Context

- Majerhat bridge, a key connector between south and southwestern Kolkata, collapsed, killing three persons and leaving more than 20 injured

Why are bridges falling?

- Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said 20 bridges in the city and its suburbs had outlived their life span
- WB being a riverine State, it has hundreds of bridges, and many were built years ago, including some dating back to colonial times.
    - For instance, the iconic Howrah Bridge, which was opened to the public in 1943, faced a peculiar problem earlier in the decade when its pillars started corroding because of spitting by thousands of gutkha-chewing commuters.
    - The steel structure was made stronger by fibre-casing by the Kolkata Port Trust.
- The State government claims that documents relating to many bridges built before independence and during the previous governments are not available, and therefore the agency that is responsible for their maintenance cannot be located.
- Tenders for repairing the bridge were brought out by the Public Works Department, but renovation was never taken up.
- Vegetation, including trees are found to be growing, indicates that adequate measures for ensuring the safety of these structures have not been taken**.**

Concerns

- The collapse reflects India's deep apathy towards designing and maintaining public infrastructure.
- Govt ignored specific warnings about the precarious state of the Majerhat bridge.
- Blame Game of the past governments has been the escape notion used by present Govt's
    - Kolkata's Vivekananda Road flyover crash in 2016, in which 27 people were killed and over 60 were injured
    - Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee tried to shift the blame to previous Left governments for clearing faulty flyover designs

Who is responsible?

- There are multiple agencies managing these structures: the Public Works Department, the Kolkata Metro Development Authority (KMDA), the Irrigation Department, the Kolkata Port Trust and the Railways.
- This often means that no one party can be held accountable for the sorry state of affairs.
- Another hurdle to repairs is that people have taken shelter under these structures and refuse to move.

What is the government doing?

- The State government has set up bridge inspection and monitoring committees under the PWD, the Irrigation Department and the KMDA. These committees will be engaged in the safety audit of the bridges.
- The State government has also banned the plying of heavy vehicles and 20-wheeler trucks on bridges and flyovers of the city.

- The government has urged the Joka-BBD Bag metro project, being carried out in the vicinity of the Majerhat bridge, to suspend work till the inquiry committee, headed by the Chief Secretary, completes its investigation.

Measures to be taken

- There should be single point of contact. With multiple organizations involved in maintaining, a framework has to be laid with one of the controlling organizations to look at overall development and sustenance
- Proper check of this infrastructure for public should be made. The executing company or public body should also have the responsibility over the material used and in the agreement entered should provide the time durability
- Reconstruct or repair the bridges which have outlived their lives. The company designing and executing the project should be responsible to handle all damages that correspond with time.
- A monitoring mechanism has to be set up to understand the stress in the system
- Sloppy maintenance or deviation from design standards should penalize.
- Light bridges developed along riverine terrine should have a board and mechanism to stop heavy vehicles whose movement can develop cracks. Cancellation of licenses and penalty should be imitated along these areas.
    - To prevent the entry of heavy vehicles to the river bridges, an arch can be built over the entrance of the bridge
- Investment in R&D and technological upgradation with incorporation of smart sensors is the need of the hour
- In case of disaster due to extreme events and natural occurrence then immediate dispatch of machinery should be put in place.

Government announces measures to stabilize rupee

Context

- The Government announced a series of measures to boost market confidence, curb the widening current account deficit which touched 2.4% of gross domestic product and stabilize the rupee.

Details

- To attract more Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI) into the corporate debt market, the government has said it will review a couple of restrictions on their investments.
    - So, the condition that FPIs' investment in a single corporate entity cannot exceed 20% of its corporate bond portfolio will be reviewed.
    - The condition that FPIs cannot invest more than 50% of an issue of corporate bonds will also be reviewed
- The government will review the mandatory hedging condition for infrastructure loans borrowed under the external commercial borrowing (ECB) route.
    - Presently there is no compulsion on borrowers to hedge these loans.
- Manufacturing companies borrowing up to $50 million through ECBs will be able to do so only for a one-year term as against the three-year term allowed earlier.
- Masala bonds will be exempted from withholding tax this financial year and Indian banks will be allowed to become market makers in masala bonds including by underwriting.
    - Masala bonds are rupee-denominated instruments issued abroad by Indian borrowers.

    - The advantage of these bonds is that any depreciation in the rupee will not affect the borrower.
- The government will take necessary steps to cut down non-essential imports and increase export

Centre hikes import duty on select goods

Context

- The government released a list of 19 categories of items on which it would be hiking import duties, which include
    - white goods such as air-conditioners, refrigerators and washing machines as well as
    - Non-essential items such as gems, travel bags and aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

Aim

- The aim is at narrowing the current account deficit (CAD) by way of increase in the basic customs duty to curb import of certain imported items.
- So it is aimed at reducing the drain of currency reserves and boost domestic demand

Details

- The total value of imports of these items in the year 2017-18 was about ₹86,000 crore.
- This hike in duty may not impact importers who procure from countries with which India currently has beneficial free trade agreements

Balancing Act

The total value of imports of the items in 2017-18 was about ₹86,000 crore.

Items	Basic customs duty (%) From	To
Air conditioners	10	20
Household refrigerators	10	20
Washing machines less than 10 kg	10	20
Compressor for air conditioners and refrigerators	7.5	10
Speakers	10	15
Footwear	20	25
Radial car tyres	10	15
Non-industrial diamond (other than rough diamonds), i.e., cut and polished diamonds	5	7.5
Diamonds-semi processed, half cut or broken	5	7.5
Lab-grown diamonds	5	7.5
Cut and polished coloured gemstones	5	7.5
Articles of jewellery and parts thereof, of precious metal or of metal clad with precious metal	15	20
Articles of goldsmith or silversmith wares and parts thereof of precious metal or of metal clad with precious metal	15	20
Bath, shower bath, sink, wash basin, etc. of plastic	10	15
Articles of plastic for conveyance and packing such as boxes, case, containers, bottles, insulated ware etc.	10	15
Tableware, kitchenware and other household items of plastic	10	15
Miscellaneous items of plastic such as office stationery, fitting for furniture's, decorative sheets, statuettes, beads, bangles etc.	10	15
Trunks, suitcase,executive cases, briefcases, travel bags and other bags etc.	10	15
Aviation turbine fuel	0	5

Concerns

- Using tariffs to curb imports of these items will not have a significant impact on narrowing the current account deficit (CAD), which is the Centre's stated objective.
- The decision to double import duties on a clutch of consumer durables to 20% could dampen consumption of these products, especially at a time when the rupee's slide against the dollar is already likely to have made these goods costlier.
- The tariff on aviation turbine fuel — which will now attract 5% customs duty instead of nil — may add to the stress of domestic airline operators, the rupee and rising oil prices having already hurt their wafer-thin margins.

Solutions

- A more robust approach in addressing the widening CAD would be to institute wide-ranging measures to boost exports and simultaneously reduce the import-intensity of the economy.
- This includes expediting the refunds on GST to exporters — smaller exporters have been badly hit by working capital shortfalls
- On import substitution, it is an irony that despite the abundance of coal reserves, thermal coal is one of India's fastest-growing imports.
    - This is a consequence of under-investment in modernizing the entire coal production and utilization chain and must be addressed expeditiously
- With global crude oil prices showing no signs of reversing their upward trajectory, and the sanctions on Iran that may force India to look for other suppliers looming, the government will need to act post-haste to address structural imbalances to keep the CAD from widening

Upping the ante

The News:

- The President of the United States of America, Donald Trump announced this week that it would be slapping $200-billion worth of Chinese exports with 10% tariff, hiking it up to 25% by the year-end.
- As a consequence of this, almost 6,000 items will be hit by the new U.S. tariffs, from September 24 onward.
- Importantly, the tariff announcement from the President of the United States of America came with the warning, "If China takes retaliatory action against our farmers or other industries, we will immediately pursue phase three, which is tariffs on approximately $267 billion of additional imports."

Larger Background and Context:

- The issue of trade wars is a topical issue these days, and should be looked into from the perspective of a global phenomenon which naturally does have an impact on India as well.
- At its core, this stems for the desire of certain countries towards 'protectionism'. Currently, there are signs of a trade war between the US and China, with each country raising import barriers and duty rates on a few products. Further, President Trump has been claiming that unilateralism in trade is good for the U.S.
- A global trade war will hurt everyone, but the question is to what extent. All economies, will be adversely affected. If there happens to be a trade war that escalates between the US and China, it is estimated that global economic growth could slow from 2.9% to 2.2% over the next four years. This estimation was carried out by a consultancy named Wood Mackenzie.

- There are a number of countries with the largest trade surplus with the United States. This list is led by China, which exports $375 billion more than it imports. China is followed, far away, by Mexico ($71 billion), Japan (69 billion), Germany (65 billion), Vietnam (38 billion), Ireland (38 billion), and Italy ($31 billion).
- Since June 1, 2018, European companies exporting steel to the U.S. have been forced to pay a 25 percent duty on the import price, and 10 percent for aluminum. In response to this decision by the U.S., the European Union (EU) has threatened to slap levies on imports of whiskey and motorcycles from the U.S. Trump, in turn, is reviewing whether he can impose higher tariffs on European car imports in the event of European retaliation.

Possible Impacts on India:

- From an impact on India perspective, we are dependent on both raw materials as well as the import of intermediate goods. Thus, should the tariffs on intermediate goods be raised globally, this would have an impact on domestic manufacturers in India as well. This could affect our 'Make in India' initiative.
- Higher tariffs on products can increase the cost of various raw materials. Further, this would invariably lead to a higher inflationary and low growth scenario. Thus, in an overall low-growth scenario, and especially considering that the Indian labour market has experienced 'jobless growth' for a while now, a global trade war will put further stress on India's labour market.
- Further, it is important to note that a situation of high inflation and low growth happened during the period of the 'Great Depression'.
- One observes that inflation is generally good for assets such as gold, while having a negative impact on currency and some sectors in the equity market. Further, the three external risk factors, namely a) higher tariffs, b) rising interest rates, and c) elevated bond sales at a time when the domestic banking system is grappling with a renewed stress of bad loans, is a serious threat to India.
- Further, in the wake of the demonetization initiative of the Government, the growth projections did slow down; if a global trade war persists, then India's own growth projections further take a hit.
- Generally speaking, any unexpected turbulence in the global financial markets could negatively affect flows to emerging markets. This can generate major challenges for a wide range of emerging market currencies; particularly in countries with high corporate debt levels, significant foreign debt holdings or weakening economic fundamentals.
- Also, India imports soyabean from the U.S., in the event of a trade war, the cost of imports of soyabean from the U.S. would be higher.

Analysis of the latest step taken:

- There are a few questions which this escalation raises. Firstly, what is the likely trajectory of this conflict? Experts believe that in the near term, the trade war will cause shrinkage in bilateral trade volumes.
- However, over the longer term, a reversal of the globalization of supply chains may take place.
- The second important question is: what impact will this trade war have on the future of the hyper-connected world that we live in today?
- For example: China, and any other nation which trades with the U.S., may seek alternative markets and trading partners, incase the U.S. continues with its retreat into economic isolationism.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is feared that global institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and a myriad other multilateral rule-making bodies may wither away, losing their authority.

- It is also feared that in the much-longer term, there may be a loss for the world community of nations. It is important to note that many of these nations have worked hard to establish the post-World War order.

Dual listing of masala bonds being explored

- Masala bonds could also be dual-listed (listing of any security on two or more different exchanges) in India under options being explored by the Stock Exchange Group and the National Stock Exchange of India.
- The idea being explored is a potential precursor of further joint listings in the future, that could see foreign currency bonds in India also being able to list in London.

Significance

- The dual listing would extend access to a wider base of global investors as well as domestic and regional investors.
- Dual listing of masala bonds would enhance visibility, increase liquidity in secondary markets, and enhance efficiency of price discovery for masala bond issuers.
- This would also reduce the cost of raising capital for all issuers and encourage the participation of a wider variety of issuers in the masala bond market.

3. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Ahvaz

- It is the capital of Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province.
- The province in the past has seen Arab separatists attack oil pipelines.
- Iran's only navigable river, the Karun, passes by the middle of the city

Context

- Iran's Revolutionary Guards were targeted in Ahvaz military parade
- Four gunmen dressed in fatigues opened fire at a military parade in southwestern Iran, killing at least 29 people including women and children.
- The brazen attack in the city of Ahvaz came as the country marked the anniversary of the start of its 1980-1988 war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq

Boundary Working Group (BWG)

- The BWG is a joint body constituted by Nepal and India in 2014 to carry out works in the fields of construction, restoration and repair of boundary pillars, including clearance of no-man's land and other technical tasks.

Context

- The 5th meeting of Nepal-India Boundary Working Group (BWG) concluded in Kathmandu

- The possibility of using high resolution satellite images in boundary survey work besides the technologies being currently used would be explored.
- The two countries also agreed to maintain status quo in cultivation of the disputed land until an agreement is reached between the two governments.

Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

- India has signed CWC in 1993. It is administered by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).
- The Authority's functions include regulation and monitoring the development, production, processing, consumption, transfer or use of toxic chemicals or precursors as specified in the Convention, among others.
- The Authority is also empowered to issue directions and even close down facilities which violate the Convention. It can liaise with other countries to seek or give assistance and protection against the use of chemical weapons. The destruction activities are verified by the OPCW.
    - Inspections extend to any place where any chemical weapon, old chemical weapon, or abandoned chemical weapon is located, or where a chemical weapon production facility exists.
    - The Act allows inspections teams to conduct "challenge inspections" of chemical facilities in the company of an Observer. An enforcement officer under the Act shall also accompany the team.
- The Act defines chemical weapons as toxic chemicals, including munitions and devices, specifically designed to cause death or other harm. The definition includes in its ambit "any equipment" specifically designed for employing chemical weapons.
- Of the four United Nations Member States that are not parties to the treaty, *Israel* has signed but not ratified the treaty, and three states have not acceded to the treaty (North Korea, Egypt, and South Sudan). Taiwan, though not a Member State, has stated that it complies with the treaty

National Authority Chemicals Weapons Convention (NACWC)

- NACWC has been established under the Chemical Weapons Convention Act, 2000 for implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, signed on behalf of the Government of India at Paris on the 14th day of January, 1993.
- NACWC is an office in the Cabinet Secretariat

Changes in the act

- In 2010, the Act was amended to widen the scope of Section 9 to give the Centre power to appoint any of its own officers, other than those of the National Authority, as enforcement officers.
- Section 16 of the original Act contains provisions for restriction on transfer of any toxic chemical or precursor. It provides that no person shall, three years after April 29, 1997, transfer to or receive from any person, who is not a citizen of a state party, toxic chemicals. This has been amended to provide that no person shall transfer to, or receive from, a state which is not a party to the Convention any toxic chemicals.

Issues

- "Major Attack", in the biological and Chemical attack is not defined properly in the nuclear doctrine
- Despite being banned, chemical weapons have not gone away. They have cropped up frequently in Syria and Iraq, where their recent use has been attributed to the Islamic State.

- The half-brother of North Korean President Kim Jong-un was killed by a nerve agent in an attack in Malaysia
- Bashar al-Assad in Syria used the *nerve agent sarin* against civilians in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta in August 2013, killing over 1,400 people.

Nerve Agents

- They are highly toxic chemicals that prevent the nervous system from working properly, and can be fatal.
- Nerve agents take different forms - including powder and gas - but they tend to be a liquid, which can seep through the skin.

What are the different types?

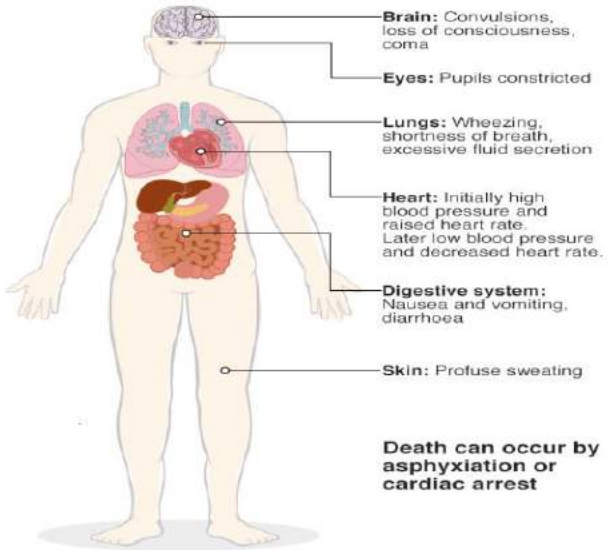
- The name Novichok means 'newcomer' in Russian and applies to a group of advanced nerve agents developed by the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.
- One of the chemicals - called A-230 - is reportedly five to eight times more toxic than VX nerve agent, which can kill a person within minutes.
- Novichok, G-Agents and V-Agents.
- G-agents include sarin while V-agents include VX, an oily amber-coloured liquid.

How are they delivered?

- The nerve agent needs to be ingested, inhaled or to penetrate through the skin, so it usually requires the person delivering it to get very close to the people they are targeting.
- Only tiny amounts are required for it to take effect. It is so toxic that it would usually be transported in something tightly sealed and those who apply it will need protective clothing.

What do they do to the body?

- Nerve agents disrupt normal messaging from the nerves to the muscles.
    - This causes muscles to become paralyzed and can lead to the loss of many bodily functions.
- Agents will act within seconds or minutes if inhaled and slightly more slowly if exposure is the result of skin contamination.



What is the treatment?

- There are antidotes to help reverse the effect of nerve agents, which the emergency services hold.
- But the sooner the treatment is delivered the better the chance of recovery.

Doklam final report lauds government

Context

- A report by the parliamentary panel on External Affairs, headed by Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, has lauded the efforts of Narendra Modi Government for the overall handling of the Doklam crisis by standing up against china but has expressed concern that Chinese infrastructure built close to the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction has not been dismantled

Extracts from report

- The Army's reaction to the crisis was laudable but Indian diplomacy failed to measure up to the task
- The panel appreciated the "brave and timely" action of security forces for checking the PLA troops from continuing with their road construction.
- The Committee is concerned about the multiple reports which allude to Chinese presence around Doklam plateau and the statements from Chinese authorities about chances of similar happenings in future also, even after the stand-off ended

Suggestions

- The panel said the Indian government should not take the Chinese lightly at any point and continue to monitor the Chinese activities along the border in general and the area in particular very intensely.
- It also suggested that military infrastructure, especially the roads on the Indian side, need to be improved.
- There is also an urgent need for high-technology gear to prepare our security forces to respond befittingly.

Exercise KAKADU

- It started in 1993, is a biannual joint exercise taking place both ashore and at sea off the coast of Darwin in Australia.
- The Indian Navy left its mark in Australia as it participated in a multilateral maritime exercise involving 27 navies
- Exercise KAKADU derives its name from Kakadu National Park, which is a protected area in the northern territory of Australia, 171 km south-east of Darwin.
- This year's exercise involves 27 nations and more than 3000 personnel which represents the largest military commitment to the exercise since it began in 1993
- Indian Navy's participation in KAKADU 2018 provides an excellent opportunity to engage with regional partners and undertake multinational maritime activities ranging from constabulary operations to high-end maritime warfare in a combined environment, aimed at enhancing interoperability and development of common understanding of procedures for maritime operations

e-VBAB (e-VidyaBharati and e-AarogyaBharati)

Context

- Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. (TCIL) signed an agreement with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for the implementation of e-VBAB (e-VidyaBharati and e-AarogyaBharati) Network Project

Details

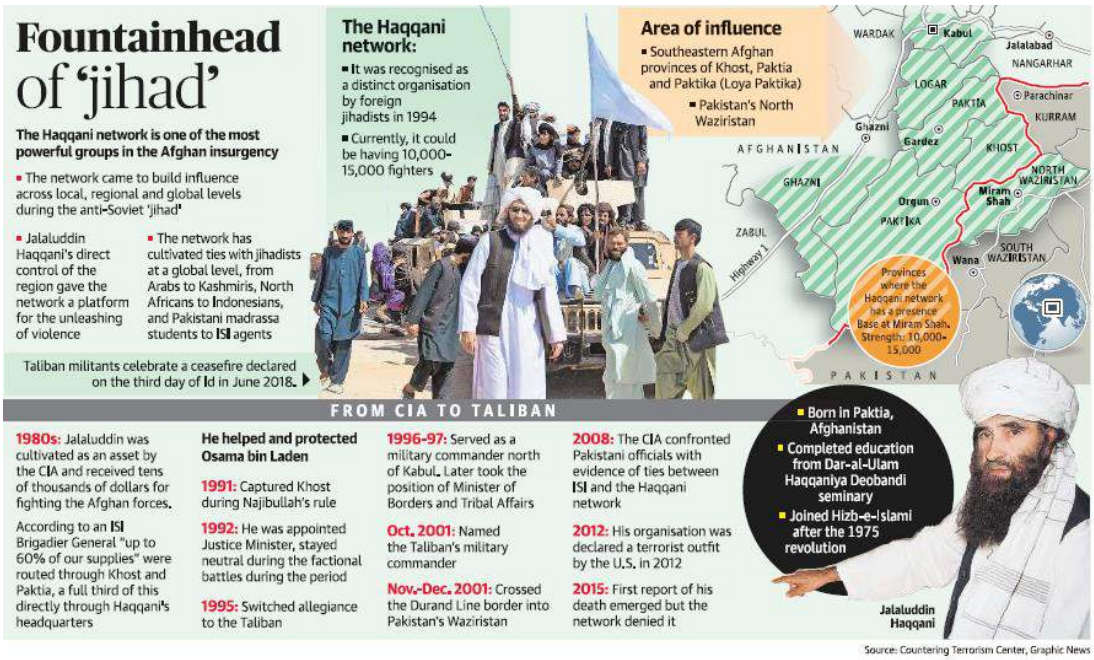
- It is a step towards capacity building in the field of education and medical science for all the 54 African Nations.
- The e-VBAB Project is fully funded by MEA, GoI and is envisaged to be implemented in 9 months followed by 5 years of operations and maintenance.
- e-VBAB Network Project will provide free tele-education courses in various academic disciplines to 4000 students every year from African countries
- The Project will also be utilized for providing free Continuing Medical Education (1000 every year) to African doctors/nurses/para-medical staff.
- Indian doctors, through this project will provide free medical consultancy to those African doctors who seek such consultanc
- There will be two separate platforms for e-VidyaBharati (tele-education) and e-AarogyaBharati (tele-medicine) which will link, through a web-based technology, various educational institutions and hospitals in India and the participating African countries.

G4

- Brazil, India ,Germany, and Japan
- The current composition of the UNSC does not reflect the changed global realities and they stressed that Security Council reform is essential to address today's complex challenges.
- The leaders emphasized that the G4 countries are legitimate candidates for permanent membership in an expanded and reformed Security Council and supported one another's candidature.
    - They pledged to work together with all member-states and to accelerate outreach towards achieving an early and meaningful reform of the Security Council.
- Germany and Japan contribute one fifth of the UN budget while the four countries together have one fifth of the world population

Haqqani's Death

- Jalaluddin, believed to have been born in Afghanistan before migrating to Pakistan's tribal areas, first came to prominence as an Afghan mujahideen commander fighting the Soviet occupation in the 1980s with the help of the U.S. and Pakistan.
- He became a Minister in the Taliban regime which took power in Afghanistan in 1996 — one of the only major mujahideen leaders to join the group -- and was close to its late founder Mullah Omar.
- His network is known for its heavy use of suicide bombers against Afghan civilians, security forces, and U.S.-led NATO troops, was a key figure in entrenching jihad in the conflict-ridden region over the past 40 years.
- His group is at the heart of regional tensions, with Washington and Kabul long suspecting the Haqqanis of having links to Pakistan's shadowy military establishment.
- But after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 toppled the regime, he pulled back from the public eye, making only a handful of appearances in later years as the fearsome reputation of the Haqqani network began to grow.



Source: Countering Terrorism Center, Graphic News

IOWave18

Context

- India, along with 23 other Indian Ocean nations, is participating in a major tsunami mock exercise — IOWave18 — being organized by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO

Details

- The aim of the exercise is to increase tsunami preparedness, evaluate response capabilities in each state and improve coordination throughout the region.
- It will involve the evacuation of over 1.25 lakh people from the coastal communities of Odisha, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Gujarat and Goa.
- NDRF battalions, Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guards, Army, and critical installations like nuclear power plants, port and harbours are also participating in the exercise
- A training workshop and tabletop exercises to enable national stakeholders to streamline their standard operating procedures (SOPs) has been done while a manual comprising specifics of conducting the tsunami exercise, along with the detailed bulletins and feedback forms was also prepared and circulated to the stakeholders

Setting up of early warning

- IOC has coordinated setting up of Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) in the aftermath of the tsunami on December 26, 2004.
- The Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC), based out of INCOIS, is capable of detecting tsunamigenic earthquakes within 10 minutes of the occurrence of earthquake on the seabed and issue timely tsunami advisories to disaster management officials as well as to vulnerable communities.
- ITEWC provides operational tsunami information to all Indian Ocean rim countries and will be participating in the IOWave18 exercise as both National Tsunami Warning Centre (NTWC) and Tsunami Service Provider (TSP) for the region.

KAZIND

- Indo-Kazakhstan Joint Army Exercise 'KAZIND' will be conducted between the Indian and Kazakhstan Army
- The aim of the exercise is to build and promote bilateral Army to Army relations and exchange skills and experiences between Kazakhstan Army and the Indian Army.
- The exercise will also serve as a platform for exchange of drills and procedures.

Significance

- The conduct of the joint exercise will set the stage for greater defence cooperation and consequently will manifest in stronger ties between the two great nations.

Logistics agreement between India and Russia

Context

- India and Russia are in the process of concluding a logistics agreement, with both sides targeting to conclude consultations
- Logistics agreements are administrative arrangements facilitating access to military facilities for exchange of fuel and provisions on mutual agreement simplifying logistical support and increasing operational turnaround of the military when operating away from India.

Maldives Elections

Context

- Maldives Opposition leader Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's scored victory over incumbent president Abdulla Yameen in the country's presidential polls.
- According to the Maldives Foreign Ministry, Maldivian Democratic Party candidate Solih won with 1,34,616 votes, against Yameen's 96,132 votes, people came out in huge numbers with the turnout being 89.2%.
- Solih was backed by former presidents Mohamed Nasheed and Abdul Maumoon Gayoom

Details

- Mr. Solih is a senior politician in the Maldives and was the joint presidential candidate for an opposition alliance of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), the Jumhooree Party and the Adhaalath Party.

    - He had served as Parliament majority leader during former president Nasheed's regime.
    - He was elected to Parliament at the age of 32 as an independent candidate in 1995, and was part of the process to draw up the country's Constitution after the then president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom introduced democratic reforms.
    - Unlike other leaders of his generation, Solih, known by his nickname – Ibu – never had to endure prison or exile.
    - Supporters cited his 25-year career as a parliamentarian as evidence of his commitment and self-restraint in contrast to some of the country's more power-hungry political leaders.
- His victory underscores the commitment of the Maldivian politicians to secure the future of democracy in their country.
- Mr. Yameen conceded defeat in a televised address by saying: "The Maldivian people have decided what they want. I have accepted the results."

Why this election in Maldives was a tough one for the opposition and Democracy?

- Former President Mohammed Nasheed, who was seen as the frontrunner, was disqualified from contesting because of a "terrorism conviction".
- Former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was behind bars on the charge of attempting a coup
- Just ahead of the elections there had also been many misgivings over the conduct of the election commission, the courts and security forces, with these worries heightened when the headquarters of the main opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party, to which Mr. Solih belongs, were raided.
- Counting procedures were changed at the last minute, which led to some confusion polling
- Many foreign journalists, including from India, were denied visas.

Tension in India Maldives Relationship

- India's relationship with the Maldives had come under considerable strain after Yameen imposed a state of Emergency to annul a Supreme Court ruling that quashed the convictions of nine opposition leaders, including Mohammed Nasheed, the country's first democratically elected leader and former president.
- India had criticized the Yameen government for the imposition of the Emergency and urged it to restore the credibility of the electoral and political process by releasing the political prisoners.
- India expressed concern over the functioning of democratic institutions, including Parliament and the judiciary, which it said were not being allowed to function in a free and transparent manner.
- Mr. Yameen responded to India's criticism of the emergency by clamping down on visas to Indian job holders
    - Fate of Indian Coast Guard and Air Force personnel stationed in the Maldives, whose visas have been pending can now be attended and taken forward by the Government of India

India's Reaction

- Ministry of External Affairs said elections marked "not only the triumph of democratic forces in the Maldives but also reflects the firm commitment to the values of democracy and the rule of law."
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi also called Mr. Solih, underscoring his support for better ties between the two countries.
- For New Delhi, the results are especially heartening as they present a chance to reset ties with Male, which have been on a downward spiral for several years.

China's investments in Maldives

- The alacrity with which Mr. Yameen embraced China caught India off guard. During his China visit, the two nations signed 12 pacts, including a free trade agreement (FTA)
    - Mr. Yameen not only fully endorsed China's ambitious Maritime Silk Road initiative but also made the Maldives the second country in South Asia, after Pakistan, to enter into an FTA with China.
- Under the Yameen administration, China invested millions of dollars in several big-ticket infrastructure projects in the nation in a bid to reverse the nation's original 'India first policy'.
- China helped build an extension to the international airport in the Maldives, and a bridge linking it to the nation's capital, Male.
- The Chinese investment in Maldives was seen as part of its "String of Pearls" strategy to emerge as a major player in South Asia by developing a network of friendly ports in the region from Sri Lanka to Pakistan.
- The Chinese investments also sparked fears in the Maldives, with opposition parties and critics accusing the Yameen government of walking into a debt trap.
    - The opposition accused the Yameen government "of allowing a Chinese 'land grab' of Maldivian islands, key infrastructure, and even essential utilities, which "not only undermines the independence of the Maldives, but the security of the entire Indian Ocean region".

How is china's foreign policy different from that of the western powers?

- Unlike the Western European powers in the first half of 20th century and the US in the second half, China, like most Asian countries, has a pragmatic view of the internal political set up of its allies.
- Europe and the US made it a point to establish in power combinations whose loyalties they felt sanguine about.
- China has shown no such qualms and has instead been agreeable to do business with whoever was in power in the foreign capital.
- This is one of the key reasons why Beijing has found agreeable ears in these countries to move into close financial relations with China.
- This is a core difference in China's foreign policy vis-a-vis the other global powers. It does not let the political changes abroad affect its business interests.

Challenges ahead

- The opposition may have been united in its desire to oust Mr. Yameen but this unity will be tested in governance.
- Democratic institutions have been weakened and a fragile democracy can also be susceptible to radical ideologies if not effectively governed.
- And China is not going anywhere in a hurry. Its economic presence in the Maldives is a reality that all governments will have to contend with.
    - So one can expect that once the new government under Solih settles in power, China will come calling with its unfinished business deals.

Way forward

- Mr. Yameen's ouster has certainly produced a favourable outcome for New Delhi and it should seize the moment to rebuild ties with Male.

- If there is one lesson out of the Maldives crisis, it is that political elites in India's neighbours will come and go but if India can stand together with the aspirations of citizens of neighbouring countries, then the prospects of a long-term sustainable relationship will be much brighter.
- Going forward, New Delhi must stay clear of partisan positioning on the internal politics of the Maldives.
- The larger agenda must be to partner the Maldives in its stability and development rather than engaging in a tug of war with China.

MiG-21s to be gifted to Russia by India

- The MiG-21, a product of the Soviet Union, was designed by the Mikoyan-Gurevich Design Bureau in the 1950s.
- It made first flight in 1956 and entered service in 1959.
- However, Russia stopped producing the aircraft in 1985, while India continued operating the upgraded variants.
- India inducted the MiG-21s in 1963 and got full technology transfer and rights to license-build the aircraft in the country.
- It is the first supersonic fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force. The IAF still has about 120 MiG-21s in service which will all be phased out of service by 2021-22.

Context

- On the sidelines of the upcoming India-Russia bilateral summit India is likely to be the gifting three MiG-21 fighter jets to Russia.
- Three MiG-21s are scheduled to be handed over to Russians based on a request from their Defence Minister to our Defence Minister. They comprise one Type 75 aircraft and two Type 77 aircraft

Details

- The aircraft to be gifted are in flight-worthy condition and the cost of crating and transportation will be borne by the Russians
- This will be major symbolic gesture to showcase the all-weather friendship and deep strategic partnership between India and Russia
- The aircraft will get new registration numbers and may be adopted for vintage flight.
- The MiG-21 has more of emotional value for Russia, as it has the distinction of being the most produced supersonic fighter in history. According to the website militaryfactory,com, close to 11,500 aircraft were built and operated by over 50 countries.

MILEX

Context

- The first joint military exercise of the seven member countries of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was conducted in Pune.

Details

- The aim of the exercise is to practice the BIMSTEC Nations in planning and conduct of counter terrorist operations.
- The exercise is focused upon learning of best practices, team building & special tactical level operations in a counter-terrorist environment in semi urban setting.

- The exercise will include training in search-and-cordon operations and handling and neutralization of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) among other things.

Nepalese Prime Minister decides not let the country's army participate in the joint military drill of the Bimstec

- A number of people have seen these developments as Nepal's legitimate response to India's economic blockade of the land-locked nation in 2015-16
- Nepal's abrupt withdrawal from the BIMSTEC military exercise causing significant diplomatic embarrassment for India, which is trying to project the regional grouping as an alternative to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc)—the latter has Pakistan as one of its members.
- Even as Oli scuttled Nepal's participation in the Pune military exercise, the Nepalese army is preparing to leave for a 12-day military exercise with China in Chengdu

Lessons for Nepal

- While there are lessons for India, there are warnings for Nepal too.
- It is alright to play the China card with India and the India card with China—almost all Indian neighbours indulge in similar practices.
- But Oli may end up taking his country in a very different direction with his unnecessary provocations to New Delhi.
- No country has come out healthier after a tight embrace with Beijing. Oli would do well to look at examples ranging from Malaysia to Sri Lanka, and even Pakistan right now

Port support to Nepal by China

- The government in Kathmandu has concluded an agreement with China to gain access to Chinese ports, including Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang and Zhanjiang.
- Nepalese goods will also have access to dry ports at Lanzhou, Lhasa and Xigatse.
- Nepal's exports through Chinese ports will never materialize to the extent that its current account will be worsened by infusion of Chinese goods and capital.

Conclusion

- India needs to develop sharper instruments to coerce hostile leadership in the neighbourhood. The blockade was a blunt instrument which caused substantial harm to the common people. But the recent engagement with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Nepal's former prime minister and current ally of Oli, is a step in the right direction.
- Nepal on other side should focus on what is good for people of Nepal and set aside political backlashes. Use of Chinese port will leave the economy in bad shape increasing the deficit as Indian ports are easy to access than the Chinese

Rapid Trident Military Exercises

Context

- Ukraine launched joint military exercises with the U.S. and a string of other NATO countries as tensions with Russia remain high over the Kremlin-backed insurgency in the country's east.

Details

- The annual Rapid Trident military exercises, taking place in the western Ukrainian village of Starychi will involve some 2,200 soldiers from 14 countries.

- The Ukrainian Border Guard Service and the National Guard troops will be involved for the first time
- The drills start a week before Russia holds its biggest military exercises since the Cold War, with the participation of China and Mongolia.

SLINEX

Context

- Indian navy ships and aircraft have arrived in Sri Lanka to take part in the joint exercise SLINEX-2018 to be held with Sri Lankan navy at Trincomalee

Details

- It is a series of bilateral maritime exercises were initiated in 2005
- The exercise which was previously held biannually has been converted to an annual event from 2018 to enhance cooperation in the maritime domain and to further strengthen mutual trust and interoperability between the two navies.
- The exercise to be conducted in two phases, namely the Harbour and Sea Phase, will involve conduct of joint training, exchange of expertise, helicopter and maritime patrol aircraft operations, search and rescue, and maneuvers at sea.
- It would also involve sports fixtures and cultural events which would provide an opportunity for personnel from both navies to learn from each other and to build individual bonds of friendship and camaraderie

United Nations Relief and Works Agency

- Created in December 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a relief and human development agency which supports more than 5 million registered Palestinian refugees, and their descendants.
- It supports those who fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 Palestine war as well as those who fled or were expelled during and following the 1967 Six Day war.
- Originally intended to provide jobs on public works projects and direct relief, today UNRWA provides education, health care, and social services to the population it supports.
- Aid is provided in five areas of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem aid for Palestinian refugees outside these five areas is provided by UNHCR.

In news

- The U.S. government has decided to stop all funding it gives to a UN agency that provides assistance to millions of Palestinian refugees, ending a decades-long policy of supporting it, according to a former senior U.S. aid official.
- The move was pushed hardest by Jared Kushner, President Donald Trump's son-in-law and top adviser on West Asia, as part of a plan to compel Palestinian politicians to drop demands that many of those refugees be given the right to return to what they call their homeland.
- Each year, the State Department transfers money by the end of September to the UN Relief and Works Agency, known as UNRWA, which provides aid to Palestinian refugees across the West Asian region.

Yudh Abhyas 2018

- A joint military training Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 was conducted in the foothills of Himalayas at Chaubattia in Uttarakhand, as part of the ongoing Indo-US defence cooperation.

Details

- The joint exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 will simulate a scenario where both nations will work together in counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment in mountainous terrain under United Nation charter.
- The training advances to joint tactical exercises wherein the battle drills of both the armies are coherently unleashed.
- The exercise is a great step for the armies of the two democratic countries to train together and gain together from each other's rich operational experiences.
- The latest exercise will help further build interoperability between the forces of both the nations.

Routes to Afghanistan: on 2+2 talks

Introduction

- Afghanistan has been one of the longest fought battles for USA to establish peace and bring stability in the region. But with the assent of Trump as President of USA things have also changed as peace process is not easy to come by.
- The Taliban has created an atmosphere of violence, with increase in violence set of coordinated assaults around Afghanistan even rejecting an offer of a three-month ceasefire by President Ashraf Ghani.
- U.S. Special Forces and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces were not able to neutralize the strong hold of Taliban beyond 150 km from the center of Kabul.
- But with repeated interventions by US air force Taliban did suffer casualties, so did the Afghan Army.

The impact of the Taliban assault in Ghazni and other cities including the deadly bombing of a Kabul school, was three-fold.

1. **It cast serious doubt on any U.S. plans to draw down troops as Mr. Trump may have envisaged.**
   - The June Id ceasefire did not result in an outcome
   - This was despite six months of concerted American punitive actions on Islamabad; the Pakistan establishment is not shutting down support for Taliban fighters.
   - Mr. Ghani even accused Pakistan of treating the terrorists in hospitals close to the Afghan-Pakistan border, while his Ministry of Defence said Pakistani fighters, including from the Lashkar-e-Toiba were among the insurgents.
   - Pakistan denied the charges, suggesting that the dead Pakistanis were actually "labourers" working in Ghazni. The violence this year has also put 2018 on course to be the deadliest year for Afghan civilians, with an average of nine people killed every day, according to UN data.

2. **Kabul's security structure has seen a dramatic series of sackings and resignations** in the aftermath.
   - National Security Adviser Hanif Atmar has been replaced by Afghanistan's Ambassador to the U.S., Hamdullah Mohib. The Defence Minister, Interior Minister, head of the National Directorate of Security and deputy chief of the National Security Council all tendered their resignations, reportedly over differences with Mr. Ghani's working; he hasn't accepted them.
   - The developments, along with the faltering peace process, will make the task of holding parliamentary elections due in October, as well as presidential elections in April 2019, much more challenging.

3. **Adding to this Afghan misery is the approach of USA in reference to Russia, China and Iran, has been even more perplexing**.

- With the constant Pressure from USA a possible talks with Taliban on the table initiated by Russia was also disturbed as Mr Ghani backed off.
- However, the U.S. has itself entered into direct engagement with the same delegation led by "political chief" Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, a UN-sanctioned former Minister in the Taliban government, when Ms. Wells went to Qatar, making U.S. disavowal of the Moscow process seem more churlish than principled.

The Iran angle

The Trump administration's collision course with Iran is another hurdle to realising its South Asia policy.

- Iran is a neighbour to both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and any action against Tehran will have consequences on the region.
- The new American push to sanction and isolate Iran will undoubtedly shift the focus from the task of resolving the situation in Afghanistan.
    - This mirrors earlier U.S. offensive actions — in Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011, Syria in 2014 — each of which took its eye off the ball in Afghanistan.
- Finally, Iran is also an alternative route for landlocked Afghanistan's trade routes to the sea, which ties in with India's desire to circumvent Pakistan by developing the Chabahar port.
    - In fact, if Washington wasn't at odds with Tehran, it may have benefited from access to the alternative supply lines to U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan.
    - Insisting instead on India cutting off ties with Iran, as successive U.S. delegations have done in the past few months, will only jeopardise this route, and affect Iran's desire to assist with the access.

Role of India

- To begin with, it is necessary that the Narendra Modi government spells out clearly its policy towards talks with the Taliban.
- India would also have to become party, hypothetically, to any future agreement that brings the Taliban into a power-sharing arrangement in Kabul, and the government must carefully study the implications of that departure from past policy.
- India must focus on assisting Afghanistan in every manner possible to ensure that the country's elections are as peaceful and participative as possible.
- On the military front as well, India must move quickly to provide helicopters as well as engineering/tech support for Afghan hardware.
- India's development assistance has been the source of its considerable influence and goodwill among Afghan citizens, and this is not the time to make cuts.
    - The outlay for 2017-18 at ₹365.96 crore was far lower than its commitment in 2015-2016 at ₹880.44 crore, according to figures tabled in Parliament. Officials say this is because major projects, such as the Salma Dam and Parliament building in Kabul, that began in 2008-09, have now been completed.
- But the question for India to answer is why are more ambitious projects not being planned?
    - While the current crop of Small Development Projects launched in 2016, encompassing drinking water plans for several cities including Kabul, supply of buses, construction of low-cost housing, and assistance in health and education are important, India's regional status demands more.

Conclusion

- So the Indian government must realize that its consistent undermining of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) because of problems with Pakistan is also weakening Afghanistan's engagement with the subcontinent, which India had worked hard to foster.
- The conversations at the 2+2 meet must take into account not just India's role in Mr. Trump's South Asia policy but its own role in its neighbourhood.

Mauritius tops India's FDI charts again

Context:

Mauritius remained the top source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India in 2017-18 followed by Singapore, whereas total FDI stood at $37.36 billion in the financial year, a marginal rise over the $36.31 billion recorded in the previous fiscal, according to RBI data.

- FDI from Mauritius totalled $13.41 billion as against $13.38 billion in the previous year.
- Inflows from Singapore rose to $9.27 billion from $6.52 billion.
- FDI from the Netherlands declined marginally to $2.67 billion as against $3.23 billion a year earlier.

Trade talks stuck as U.S. presses oil, aircraft sales to India

Context

- India and the United States are in a deadlock over contentious trade issues after the Donald Trump administration sought a formal commitment of additional purchases of $10 billion annually for the next three years, as part of a trade agreement under negotiation.
- India has a surplus of $23 billion in trade with America, and the U.S. wants to wipe that off by forcing more imports by New Delhi, as part of a proposed trade agreement.

Pak. duplicity key hurdle in fight against terror: Sushma

Context

- In a speech in United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said Pakistan's duplicity is a key obstacle in the global fight against terrorism and India is an immediate and continuing target of terrorism originating from there.

Extracts from the speech

- The most startling evidence of this duplicity was the fact that Osama Bin Laden, the architect and ideologue of 9/11 was given safe haven in Pakistan….that claimed to be America's friend and ally
- The killers of 9/11 met their fate; but the mastermind of 26/11 Hafiz Saeed still roams the streets of Pakistan with impunity
- Pakistan glorifies killers; it refuses to see the blood of innocents
- The international community has become increasingly aware of Pakistan's role in promoting terrorism, the absence of an international agreement on the definition of terrorism allows Pakistan to characterise terrorists as "freedom fighters,"

Sushma Swaraj reiterated India's demand for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the UN General Assembly.
The CCIT was proposed by India in 1996.Its objectives are

- 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.

Currently there is opposition from the three main blocs that have raised objections: the U.S., the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the Latin American countries.

- The most powerful objector, the U.S. has been worried about the application of the CCIT to its own military forces especially with regard to interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.
    - The US wanted the draft to exclude acts committed by military forces of states during peacetime.
- Latin American countries that had concerns about human rights laws
- The OIC wants exclusion of national liberation movements, especially in the context of Israel-Palestinian conflict.

The United Nations must accept that it needs fundamental reform. Reform must begin today; tomorrow could be too late. If the UN is ineffective, the whole concept of multilateralism will collapse

MoU between NITI Aayog, and Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation (MEDRF)

Context:

- The Union has given its approval for signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NITI Aayog, and Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation (MEDRF) in the field of social, economic, industrial and regional development programs.

Objective:

- To explore the potential of cooperation in the framework of preparation and implementation of strategies and programs of social, economic, industrial and regional development. It provides a framework and enabling environment to understand each other's strengths, market, technologies, policies, etc.

The MoU covers the following areas of cooperation:

- Conducting and execution of joint research projects related to issues of mutual interest;
- Exchange of information and research works related to issues of mutual interest between the two sides, including information on government strategies and development programs;
- Visits of relevant specialists of both sides for participation in joint events;
- Organization of seminars, conferences and other meetings on agreed agenda; and
- Other forms of cooperation as per mutual consent of the Sides.

India and Morocco sign Air Services Agreement

- India and Morocco signed the revised Air Services Agreement between the two countries enabling greater connectivity through a modernized agreement.

Benefits:

- Greater air connectivity between India and Morocco and will enable the airlines of each side to enter into code share with airlines of other party, as well as provide greater freedom in mounting direct flights.
- These developments in the Civil Aviation sector will enable the people of each country to travel to the other country leading to better economic and cultural ties.

Seeking a managed exit

Context:

- Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani visited New Delhi on September 19, 2018 and was there on a day-long working visit.
- This visit was a low-key visit.
- The reason attributed to the low-key nature of the visit is the growing sense of uncertainty that prevails.
- In the month of May, 2018, seven engineers working for KEC International went missing after being kidnapped. It is presumed that during this visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took up the issue of seven engineers with Mr. Ghani, and Mr. Ghani would have assured him about Kabul's sincere efforts to rescue them.
- Although, during this visit, Pro-forma references to the Strategic Partnership and the New Development Partnership were made, but there were no new announcements.
- During this visit, India reiterated its support for 'an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace and reconciliation process' with the Taliban. .

Analysis:

- It is important to note that even a year after U.S. President Donald Trump came out with his new Afghanistan policy, the stalemate continues to exist.
- Unfortunately, incidents of violence and civilian casualties keep going up.

The Geo-politics at work:

- The U.S. had announced a policy in the year 2017. The objectives of this policy were to break the military stalemate on the ground by expanding both the presence and the role of the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.
- However, operational constraints were witnessed. These constraints were eased after calling for surveillance and air support.

- Crucially, the Obama approach of announcing timelines for withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan was replaced by a conditions-based approach.
- Recently, the U.S. even announced that it was cancelling $300 million in military aid to Pakistan. However, it is clear that U.S.'s Pakistan policy, has once again failed to change Pakistan's behaviour.

A Conundrum the U.S. Faces

- Historically, U.S.'s Pakistan policy has oscillated for 17 years between persuasion using pay-offs and punishing by withholding or cancelling pay-offs.
- It is important to note that the Pakistani military and the ISI do not support the idea of a territorially united, peaceful and stable Afghanistan.
- Having said this, the ISI is unlikely to support the idea of a complete Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Crucially, the ISI prefers a controlled instability in Afghanistan where the Taliban enjoys some power but wants more as this keeps the group dependent on the ISI.
- This is a bind which the U.S. is unable to get out of. As long as the U.S. maintains a significant military presence in Afghanistan, it remains dependent on communication and supply routes through Pakistan.
- The U.S. is unable to take stronger measures such as

  a) Directly targeting the insurgent safe havens in Pakistan,
  b) Terminating its status as "a non-NATO ally"
  c) Sanctioning specific military officers or
  d) Considering placing Pakistan on the list of 'state sponsors of terrorism'.
- In conclusion, the U.S.'s dependence provides the security establishment in Pakistan a degree of influence in Washington that has enabled it to receive over $33 billion over the last 17 years.
- This has been witnessed, despite the ups and downs in the relationship between these two countries. In fact, the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan can only be described as an unhappy marriage that neither side is able to terminate.

Concluding Remarks:

- Currently, the U.S. appears to be seeking a managed exit.
- In a departure from the norm, the U.S. opened direct talks with the Taliban around two months ago.
- On seeing the past, we witness that the U.S. had refrained earlier from doing so. They earlier used to maintain that this would undermine the legitimacy of the Kabul government. Therefore, the U.S. had prodded Pakistan to deliver the Taliban to an 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' reconciliation process which did not happen.
- Recently, even Russia entered the fray. Russia used the IS argument to open up direct talks with the Taliban more than a year ago.
- With encouragement from the U.S., Uzbekistan has also entertained senior Taliban leaders in Tashkent. This was done so in an effort to persuade them to engage in talks with Kabul.
- China on the other hand is concerned about its Uighur militants problem. In fact, China is planning to train and equip an Afghan brigade to be deployed in Badakshan even as it seeks Taliban help in securing its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects.
- This has given the Taliban a new legitimacy- something being looked upon as something exactly what Pakistan had wanted.
- With the emergence of the Islamic State, a distinction between good Taliban and bad Taliban is no longer necessary.
- Finally, it is suggested that with so many different players pulling in different directions, peace will remain illusory in the region.

4. SOCIAL ISSUES

Adultery is no more a crime says Supreme Court

Context

- The Supreme Court unanimously struck down Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code that makes adultery a punishable offence for men.
- In four separate but concurring judgments, the five-judge bench of the Supreme Court said the 158-year-old law was unconstitutional and fell foul of Article 21 (Right to life and personal liberty) and Article 14 (Right to equality).

Details

- Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, who pronounced the judgment in concurrence with Justice AM Khanwilkar, said while adultery could be a ground for civil issues, including dissolution of marriage, it could not be a criminal offence.
    - Two individuals may part if one cheats, but to attach criminality to infidelity is going too far
    - Besides, there is no data to back claims that abolition of adultery as a crime would result in "chaos in sexual morality" or an increase of divorce.
    - Punishing each other or the wife's lover is unlikely to re-kindle commitment and being majors they would be able to decide the future obligation
- The apex court also declared Section 198(1) and 198(2) of the CrPC, which allows a husband to bring charges against the man with whom his wife committed adultery, unconstitutional.
- However, if any aggrieved spouse ended her life because of her partner's adulterous relation, it could be treated as an abetment to suicide if evidence was produced, the CJI said
- The CJI further said Section 497 was manifestly arbitrary and offends the dignity of women.
    - Stating that the beauty of our Constitution was that it includes " I, me and you", Misra said equality was the governing principle of a system.

On Privacy and State Control in relevance to other important sections

- How married couples deal with adultery is "absolutely a matter of privacy at its pinnacle" and the state has no role in treating it as a criminal offence
- The Chief Justice cited several of these other offences like Section 498-A (dowry harassment), the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, Sections 306 (abetment of suicide) or 304B (dowry death) or 494 (bigamy) of the Indian Penal Code.
- Let it be clearly stated, by no stretch of imagination, one can say, that Section 498-A or any other provision enters the private realm of matrimonial relationship… There has been correct imposition by law not to demand dowry or to treat women with cruelty so as to compel her to commit suicide. These activities deserve to be punished and the law has rightly provided so

Justice Indu Malhotra

- She held that Section 497 is based on the Doctrine of Coverture.
- This doctrine, not recognized by the Constitution, holds that a woman loses her identity and legal right with marriage, is violative of her fundamental rights.
- It is a feudal law that dictates and holds a view that women are subordinate to men after marriage.
- Prior to marriage a woman could freely execute a will as she wished. Once she married, however, her legal existence as an individual was suspended under "marital unity," a legal fiction in which the husband and wife were considered a single entity: the husband. The husband exercised almost exclusive power and responsibility and rarely had to consult his wife to make decision

Justice Chandrachud

- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud termed Section 497 as a "codified rule of patriarchy".
- Marriage does not mean ceding autonomy of one to the other. Ability to make sexual choices is essential to human liberty. Even within private zones, an individual should be allowed her choice
- Society imposes impossible virtues on a woman. Raises her to a pedestal. Confines her to spaces. Objectifies her and says she should be pure.
    - But society has no qualms to commit rape, honour killings, sex-determination and infanticide

How is it in other Countries?

- The judges noted that most countries had abolished laws against adultery.

Case history

Concerns

- It is a matter of concern that refreshing the statute books is being left to the judiciary, without any proactive role of Parliament in amending regressive laws.
- The shocking message here is not merely that provisions such as Section 497 or 377 remained so long in the IPC, it is also that Parliament failed in its legislative responsibility to address them.

Andh

- They are a designated Scheduled Tribe in Telangana and Maharashtra.
- Andh claim themselves to be the original descendants of Andhra dynasty or Satvahana dynasty that ruled between third century BC
- The word Andh is derived from the word Andhra community

International Women Entrepreneurs Summit

- The main objective of the summit is to bring together achievers, women business leaders, professionals, international service providers, resource organizations, experts, government representatives and other stakeholders with a focus on innovative economic transformation through discussions and collaborations.
- The theme of event is "Equality begins with Economic Empowerment".
- The event is organized by the South Asian Women Development Forum.
- It was held in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Krishna Kutir

- It is an initiative of Ministry of Women and Child Development
- Krishna Kutir is a special home for 1000 widows set up by the Ministry of Women & Child Development under Swadhar Greh scheme of the Ministry and is the largest ever facility of its kind created by a government organization.
- It will help to mitigate the plight of widows living in pathetic condition in Vrindavan.
- In order to provide dignified and humane living conditions to them, the Ministry, as a special case, constructed this Krishna Kutir at the temple town of Vrindavan with all the required facilities.

Lepchas

- The Lepcha are also called the Rongkup meaning the children of God
- They are the aboriginal inhabitants of Sikkim and they are mostly settled in North Sikkim.
    - Some population can also be found in WB, Nepal, Bhutan etc.
- The Lepcha have their own language, also called Lepcha.
    - It belongs to the Bodish–Himalayish group of Tibeto-Burman languages. The Lepcha write their language in their own script, called Róng or Lepcha script, which is derived from the Tibetan script.
- Most Lepchas are Buddhist, a religion brought by the Bhutias from the north, although a large number of Lepchas have today adopted Christianity
- The Lepcha trace their descent patrilineally.

Live-in partners can adopt now

Context

- Child Adoption Regulatory Authority (CARA) has withdrawn a circular which it had released earlier about disallowing live in couples to adopt children as the Authority felt children should be placed only with a stable family and individuals in a live-in relationship cannot be considered as stable family but now it has given consent for couple to adopt children.

Details

- They will be able to adopt children from and within India
- The circular and applications from prospective adoptive parents will be examined on a case-by-case basis

Criteria

- The eligibility criteria under Adoption Regulations, 2017, permit single women to adopt a child of any gender, while single men can adopt only boys.
- When a married couple seeks to adopt a child, it needs to give its consent for adoption and should be stable marriage for at least two years.
- Applicants have to be physically, mentally and financially stable to raise a child.

Manual Scavenging

- Scavenging has been an occupation imposed upon certain citizens of the country by the society, which later on continued as a traditional occupation where a section of people among Scheduled Castes was ordained to clean the night soil and carry it manually on their heads. This class of citizens of India is known as Manual Scavengers.
- Manual scavenging exists primarily because of absence of water borne latrines. Using a broom, a tin plate and a drum, they clear and carry human excreta from toilets, more often on their heads, to dumping grounds and disposal sites

Institutional Problems

- The States/UT's are slow in identification of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers as there is no time-bound plan for identification of insanitary latrines and manual scavengers

- In spite of a legal obligation to do so, State governments are not keen to demolish and rebuild old facilities lacking sanitation, or conduct a full census of both the latrines and the people engaged in clearing such waste.

Health Concerns

- They are exposed to the most virulent forms of viral and bacterial infections that affect their skin, eyes, limbs, respiratory and gastrointestinal systems.

Social and Economic Concerns

- Even though, in modern times these people desire to leave the profession, their social, economic, educational and cultural aspects have made it difficult for them to find an alternate profession.
- The social stigma of untouchability continues to stick, in one form or the other largely because of the unclean nature of their occupation.
- Many communities still regard the inclusion of a sanitary toilet as ritual and physical pollution of the house, and even the less conservative are ready to accept only large, expensive and unscientific structures much bigger than those recommended by the WHO.
- More pernicious is the entrenched belief in the caste system that assumes Dalits will readily perform the stigmatized task of emptying latrines.

Measures taken

- In the past(before 1980), the main efforts of the Government were concentrated on improving the working and living conditions of scavengers and not the core problem of converting dry latrines to pour flush latrines in any systemic manner.
- The National Scheme for Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers and their Dependents (NSLRS) was started for providing alternative employment to the liberated scavengers and their dependents.
- The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 provides for the prohibition of employment of people as manual scavengers and the rehabilitation of manual scavengers and their families.

What needs to be done?

- A determined approach to end the scourge requires a campaign against social prejudice that impedes solutions. Change now depends on the willingness of the courts to fix responsibility on State governments, and order an accurate survey of the practice especially in those States that claim to have no insanitary latrines or manual scavenging.
- Raising the confidence level among those engaged in manual cleaning is vital; even official data show their reluctance to take up self-employment.
- Empowerment holds the key to change, but that would depend on breaking caste barriers through education and economic uplift.
- Compensation sanctioned should be paid immediately; only a fraction of those with verified claims have received it.

Mobilize Your City (MYC)

- It is part of an international initiative which is supported by the French and the German Governments and was launched at 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) meeting in December, 2015.
- Based on a proposal made by Agence Française de Development (AfD) in 2015, the European Union has agreed to provide funds of Euro 3.5 million through the AFD to contribute to specific investments and technical assistance components within the Mobilise Your City (MYC) programme in India.
- The MYC aims at supporting three pilot cities viz. Nagpur, Kochi and Ahmedabad in their efforts to reduce their Green House Gas (GHG) emissions related to urban transport by implementing urban mobility plans at local level and to help India at national level to improve their sustainable transport policy.

The main components of the proposed assistance are:

- to support planning and implementation of sustainable urban transport projects,
- support to strengthening institutional capacity for regulating, steering and planning urban mobility, and
- Learning and exchange formats with other cities across India for exchanges on best practices.

Context

- India and France have signed an implementation agreement on "MOBILISE YOUR CITY" (MYC) vy Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and Agence Française de Development (AfD)

Prison of patriarchy

Why India's female workforce participation is so low?

- India's female workforce participation is among the lowest in the world. The Economic Survey 2017-18 revealed that women comprise only 24% of the Indian workforce.
- Marriage is a career stopper for the majority of Indian women and this cultural abhorrence towards women working continues.
    - The cultural baggage about women working outside the home is so strong that in most traditional Indian families, quitting work is a necessary precondition to the wedding itself
    - This phenomenon is far more significant in higher income demographics, implying that the richer the family is, lower the chances that they allow women to pursue a career.
- Childbirth and taking care of elderly parents or in-laws account for the subsequent points where women drop off the employment pipeline.
- A survey by Catalyst, a management consultancy firm said that the most significant drop-off point is between the junior and middle management levels
    - It pegged this number at a whopping 50%, compared to 29% in other Asian economies
- In fact, as India grows economically, the number of women in workplaces is declining steadily. This, even though the enrolment of girls in higher education courses is growing steadily — to 46% in 2014 from 39% in 2007.

Concerns

- On the macroeconomic level, this suggests that we're giving up on a 27% boost to the country's GDP.
- At the individual level, without any recourse to financial means, women stay tethered to the family.

- Ending a marriage is such a daunting task — socially and legally — that even the thought of embarking on it without financial independence is terrifying.

SC sets 25% of ex-husband's net salary as benchmark for alimony

- The Supreme Court has stated that 25% of a husband's net salary might constitute a "just and proper" amount as alimony in order to protect her financially leaving divorced women with full custody of the children at a quarter of the family income

Conclusion

- With India aspiring to be a global superpower cultural impediments should be set free and women need to be given wings of freedom to explore the right to live with independence and support self financially

Portals to strengthen Women Safety

Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC)

- This portal is convenient and user friendly that will enable complainants in reporting cases without disclosing their identity.
- This will not only aid the victims/complainants but also help the civil society organizations and responsible citizens to anonymously report complaints pertaining to child pornography, child sexual abuse material or sexually explicit material such as rape and gang rape.
- Complainants can also upload the objectionable content and URL to assist in the investigation by the State Police.
- The complaints registered through this portal will be handled by police authorities of respective State/UTs.
- There are other features such as a victim or complainant can track his/her report by opting for "report and track" option using his/her mobile number.

National Database on Sexual Offenders (NDSO)

- It is accessible only to law enforcement agencies, will assist in effectively tracking and investigating cases of sexual offences.
- It is a central database of "sexual offenders" in the country which will be maintained by the NCRB for regular monitoring and tracking by the State Police.
- The database will include offenders convicted under charges of rape, gang rape, POCSO and eve teasing. At present the database contains 4.4 lakh entries.
- The State Police have been requested to regularly update the database from 2005 onwards. The database includes name, address, and photograph and fingerprint details for each entry.
- However, the database will not compromise any individual's privacy.

National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)

- It will proactively identify such objectionable content and take up with intermediaries for its removal.
- For this NCRB has already been notified as the Government of India agency to issue notices under Section 79(3) b of IT Act.

Sabarimala Verdict

Context

- The Supreme Court, in a majority opinion of 4:1, lifted the centuries-old practice of prohibiting women from the age of menarche (the first occurrence of menstruation) to menopause (point in time when menstrual cycles permanently cease) to enter the Lord Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala in Kerala.

Details

- "Right to pray' in the temple for women between 10 and 50 years of age won over the 'right to wait' campaign as the Supreme Court condemned the prohibition as "hegemonic patriarchy". Patriarchy cannot trump freedom to practice religion
- It said that exclusion on grounds of biological and physiological features like menstruation was unconstitutional. It amounted to discrimination based on a biological factor exclusive to gender. It was violative of the right to equality and dignity of women.
- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud held that to treat women as the children of a lesser God was to blink at the Constitution; The prohibition was a form of untouchability.
- The majority view declared Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorization of Entry) Act of 1965, which mandates the prohibition in Sabarimala temple, as ultra vires the Constitution.
- Art 51 A: to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women;
    - Prohibition of women's entry to the shrine solely on the basis of womanhood and the biological features associated with womanhood is derogatory to women

Bombay versus Narasu Appa Mali

- This Bombay High Court judgment said that personal law, religious customs, usages and beliefs are outside the ambit of fundamental rights of equality, life and dignity
- It held that personal law is not 'law' or 'laws in force' under Article 13. This 1951 judgment was never challenged in the Supreme Court.
- The judge Chandrachud wrote the immunity given to personal law customs deviates from the "vision of social transformation" of the Constitution.
- The judgment of Narasu Appa Mali is yet to be overruled and holds the field as far as protection of personal laws from the test of Constitutionality is concerned.
- However, today's judgment by Chandrachud which opines on the correctness of Narasu could very well be the beginning of the end for 67-year-old judgment.

A deity in a temple does not have any constitutional rights, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud

- Fundamental rights are meant for individuals not deities or idol
- Merely because a deity has been granted limited rights as juristic persons under statutory law does not mean that the deity necessarily has constitutional rights

Dissenting Voice

- Justice Indu Malhotra, the lone woman judge on the Constitution Bench, dissented from the majority opinion. She held that the determination of what constituted an essential practice in a religion should not be decided by judges on the basis of their personal viewpoints.

- She held that essentiality of a religious practice or custom had to be decided within the religion.
- It was a matter of personal faith. India was a land of diverse faiths. Constitutional morality in a pluralistic society gave freedom to practice even irrational or illogical customs and usages.
- Justice Malhotra observed that the freedom to practice their beliefs was enshrined in Article 25 of the Constitution. Harmonization of fundamental rights with religion included providing freedom for diverse sects to practise their customs and beliefs.

Conclusion

- The decision reaffirms the Constitution's transformative character and derives strength from the centrality it accords to fundamental rights.
- The Court has attempted to grapple with the stigmatization of women devotees that is largely based on a medieval view of menstruation as symbolizing impurity and pollution.
- To Chief Justice Dipak Misra, any rule based on segregation of women pertaining to biological characteristics is indefensible and unconstitutional.
- Further, devotion cannot be subjected to the stereotypes of gender.
- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud asserted that stigma built around traditional notions of impurity has no place in the constitutional order, and exclusion based on the notion of impurity is a form of untouchability.
- CJI Misra also went on to add that the devotees of Ayyappa do not constitute a separate religious denomination.
- Justice Rohinton F. Nariman said the fundamental rights claimed by worshippers based on 'custom and usage' must yield to the fundamental right of women to practice religion. The decision reaffirms the Constitution's transformative character and derives strength from the centrality it accords to fundamental rights.

Section 377

Context

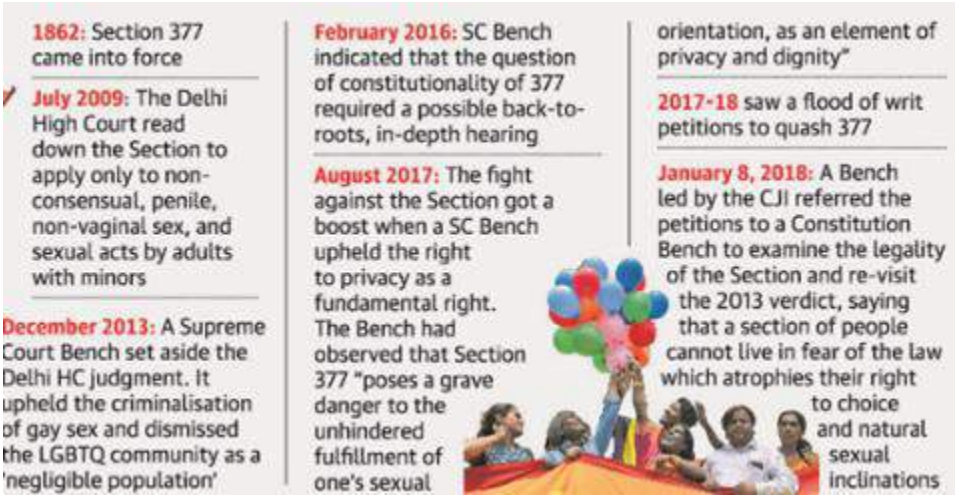
- In a landmark judgment a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court decriminalized homosexuality, with a prayer to the LGBTQ community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) to forgive history for subjecting them to "brutal" suppression.

What did SC say?

- The Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, unanimously held that criminalization of private consensual sexual conduct between adults of the same sex under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was clearly unconstitutional.
- The court, however, held that the Section would apply to "unnatural" sexual acts like bestiality.
- Sexual act without consent continues to be a crime under Section 377.
- In four concurring opinions, the Constitution Bench declared the 156-year-old "tyranny" of Section 377 "irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary."
- Section 377 thus far punished homosexuality with 10 years of imprisonment.
- Section 377 discriminated against a minority based solely on their sexual orientation. It violated the right of the LGBTQ community to "equal citizenship and equal protection of laws." The court held that bodily autonomy was individualistic. Choice of a partner was part of the fundamental right to privacy. The court set aside its 2013 judgment in the Suresh Koushal case.

- In its decision in Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, the Supreme Court has finally struck down the colonial-era law criminalizing homosexuality and the lives of LGBTQ persons.

Chronology



Transition

- The first blow to Koushal came with the NALSA vs Union of India (2014) judgment. Carefully written, and without overstepping its jurisdiction (as it sidestepped Koushal), it granted gender recognition on a self-identification basis to the transgender communities.
- The privacy judgment of KS Puttaswamy vs Union of India and Others (2017). The Supreme Court, through judgments authored by different judges, held that the treatment of privacy in Koushal was wrong.
- The right to choice was extended to the choice of partner under Hadiya's case and the khap panchayat's judgment.

Comments

- CJI: Section 377 assumes the characteristic of unreasonableness, for it becomes a weapon in the hands of the majority to seclude, exploit and harass the LGBT community. Bigoted and homophobic attitudes dehumanise. Section 377 is irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary.
    - The Chief Justice quoted German thinker Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who said, "I am what I am, so take me as I am."
- Homosexuality is documented in 1,500 species and is not unique to humans, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said, dispelling the prejudice that it is against the order of nature. He quoted from an article that said homosexual behaviour existed in all species, except those that never have sex.
- Justice Misra recalls that the Indian Constitution is a "great social document, Supreme Court calls the Constitution of India a great social document, almost revolutionary in its aim of transforming a medieval, hierarchical society into a modern, egalitarian democracy". The very purpose of constitutionalism is to transform society. Dynamic constitutional interpretation allows for the progressive realization of rights as societies evolve.

Doctrine of Non-Retrogression

- The non-retrogression principle holds that government may extend protection beyond what the Constitution requires, but it cannot retreat from that extension once made.
- It means that once a right is recognized, it cannot be reversed.
- This crucial principle in International Human Rights Law broadly enjoins a State that has progressively achieved a certain level of human rights protection to its citizens from causing any reduction in that status at a future time.
- So, as per this doctrine, there must not be any regression of rights. In a progressive and an ever-improving society, there is no place for retreat. The society has to march ahead.

Violations it caused

- It violated Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 of the Constitution.
- Crucially, Justices DY Chandrachud and Indu Malhotra, in their concurring opinions, have also found that Section 377 violates Article 15's prohibition against sex discrimination, specifically noting that "sex" under Article 15 includes "sexual orientation".
- There can be no doubt that an individual also has a right to a union under Article 21 of the Constitution. When we say union, we do not mean the union of marriage, though marriage is a union. As a concept, union also means companionship in every sense of the word, be it physical, mental, sexual or emotional. The LGBT community is seeking realization of its basic right to companionship, so long as such a companionship is consensual, free from the vice of deceit, force, coercion and does not result in violation of the fundamental rights of others.
- The prejudice and stigma piled on the LGBTQ community has denied it even basic medical care in the country
    - They succumb to marry the opposite sex, leading to a life of mental trauma and bi-sexuality.
    - Section 377 has hampered HIV/AIDS coverage. Many self-excluded themselves from the benefits of government programmers out of fear of life-threatening discrimination and backlash.
- The provision violated the rights of LGBTQ persons to dignity, equality, privacy and expression.

Examples from World

- Leo Varadkar
    - The son of an Indian father and Irish mother an Indian immigrant has made Irish history by becoming the country's youngest and first openly gay prime minister.
- Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir
    - She is an Icelandic politician and the former Prime Minister of Iceland, who is a lesbian.

Merits

- It restores dignity and gives hope for enabling better care to HIV-positive gay individuals who previously were faced with the dilemma of going untreated or facing ridicule and discrimination after coming out.

Challenges

- Indian society remains largely conservative and strongly disapproves of gay relationships. So in India, homsexuality remains a matter of social stigma.
- A lot of Indians — even the educated ones — regard homosexuality as immoral, revolting and disgusting, law or no law.
- Law and morality are different issues. Our legislators may frame laws or courts deliver judgments that are ahead of the moral values of a society. But it would be farfetched to expect that moral values can be changed because of court judgments.

Conclusion

- The court, through this decision, has harnessed the transformative power of the Constitution and amplified a way of thinking rooted in the values of respect for dignity, equality and fraternity. This will usher in a new inclusive India.
- The judgment articulates a vision of constitutional supremacy that will guide Indian democracy well into the future.
- Ambedkar saw liberty, equality and fraternity as principles of life, as a collective "union of trinity". To divorce one from the other," he said, "is to defeat the very purpose of democracy." This judgement lives upto this idea.

Section 377 verdict retains bestiality as crime

- Supreme Court judgment decriminalizing homosexuality has been hailed, But the judgment has retained one feature of the colonial-era Section 377: sex with animals remains a crime.

The key argument against bestiality centres on consent

- Humans, heterosexual or homosexual, can consent to sex, animals cannot communicate their choice.
    - Paedophiles are criminals because they have sex with children, who cannot offer informed consent.
    - The law on rape, similarly, emerges from the idea that no human being ought to impose their will on another's body.
- Animals cannot offer consent, the argument goes, and thus bestiality ought to be criminal.
- The second, more plausible, argument against bestiality is that it is cruel to animals.
- Some opponents of bestiality add to this argument a third claim that it is unnatural

Consent cannot be applied to animals

- In the case of animals, though, it's simply impossible to know. Indeed, there is no way of knowing if the term consent has any meaning for animals. But, it is surely significant that the case for animal consent is raised only—only—in the case of sex.
- Human societies have no great concern for the agency of animals while artificially inseminating them, castrating them -- or, most obviously, killing and eating them.

Unnatural proposition is demonstrably untrue

- Zoologists have documented monkeys mating with deer, and fur seals seeking to mate with king penguins.
- Genetically-close species, like coyotes and wolves or grizzly bears and polar bears, even give birth to offspring.
- Humans share Neanderthal DNA, making it clear the two species interbred when they encountered each other in Eurasia some 40,000 years ago.

Section 498A: SC says welfare committees not needed in dowry cases

Context

- The Supreme Court modified its earlier order on setting up family welfare committees to look into cases of dowry harassment.

Section 498-A IPC

- It is a cognizable and non-bailable offence. A guilty person faces up to three years in prison and shall also be liable to fine.

2017 Order

- The court had ordered 'family welfare committees' to be set up in the districts.
- These committees, composed of eminent citizens, were supposed to act as a vanguard against "disgruntled wives" using the anti-dowry harassment provision of Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as a "weapon" against their husbands and in-laws, young and old, rather than a "shield."
- Even the police could register an FIR only after the committee cleared the complaint as valid and not frivolous.

- SC had raised this concern over abuse of the anti-dowry law and had also said that no arrest "should be affected" without authenticating allegations as a violation of human rights of innocents can't be swept aside.

Current Judgment

- A bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra withdrew the court's direction from July 2017
- The judges accepted that such a committee would create an extrajudicial entity not envisaged in the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- They also decided to remove another guideline that gave a district judge the power to dispose of proceedings if the parties in a case reach a settlement. Such a power in a non-compoundable provision such as Section 498A exclusively belongs to the High Court, the top court held
- It restored to the police their power to immediately register an FIR and act on a dowry harassment complaint filed by a married woman.
- It further says a designated police officer should be there to probe dowry complaints. It ordered the Director General of Police of every State to provide such officers rigorous training

Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits (SAECK)

- SAECK or 'rape investigation kits' are designed to carry out immediate medico-legal investigation and aid in furnishing evidence in sexual assault and rape cases.
- Each of these kits comprises essential items that will aid in furnishing evidence such as blood and semen samples in sexual assault and rape cases.
- The kit has a set of test tubes and bottles, which mention about contents and specifications.
- These kits also contain instructions on collection of evidence from the crime scene. The SAECKs would be sent to the closest laboratory and within two months the results would be out.
- Police stations in the country will soon have special kits to collect blood and semen samples, besides other evidence, to carry out immediate investigation into sexual assault cases

Funding

- The 'rape investigation kits' will be procured by the respective states with financial support under the central government's 'Nirbhaya Fund', which was named after the 2012 Delhi gang-rape victim.
- The cost of the project would be shared between the central government (from the Nirbhaya Fund) and respective states in the ratio of 60:40.

Implementation and training

- The Directorate of Forensic Sciences (DFSS), a wing of the Home Ministry, has issued two guidelines
    - one for investigators and prosecutors for collection, storage and transportation of forensic evidence in sexual assault cases;
    - Second for medical officers dealing with sexual assault cases.
- The Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D) is undertaking training of officers during the financial years of 2018-19 and 2019-20 on collection, storage and transportation of forensic evidence in cases of sexual assault, which includes training on standardized SAECK.
- The BPR&D would also undertake training of trainers, and training of investigators and prosecutors from states and union territories.

Solar Mamas (Rural women solar engineers)

- They are a group of nearly 30 rural women solar engineers from six African countries who have been trained under India's developmental support for harnessing solar energy.
- The 'Solar Mamas', who come from across Africa, are trained at Barefoot college in Rajasthan's Tilonia village

Functions Performed by them

- They are trained to fabricate, install, use, repair and maintain solar lanterns and household solar lighting systems in their villages.
- The women are also trained in solar electrification and other entrepreneurial skills such as bee-keeping and tailoring.
- Under Government of India-supported programmes, the college in Rajasthan has been promoting and training rural women solar engineers from Africa in household solar lighting systems.
- A barefoot women vocational training college in Zanzibar Islands of Tanzania and other countries in Africa has also been setup for imparting solar electrification skills and distributing solar kits.
- They will replicate the model in their villages by installing solar lanterns and panels, and train the women in their communities for the electrification of their homes.

Barefoot College

- It is a voluntary organization working in the fields of education, skill development, health, drinking water, women empowerment and electrification through solar power for the upliftment of rural people
- It was founded by Bunker Roy in 1972 located in Tilonia.
    - It is a village in Ajmer district in Rajasthan
- It empowers marginalized women by training them to become solar engineers, artisans, dentists, broadcasters and doctors for their own villages.
    - The institution has so far trained over 15,000 women in various skills.
- Training in solar energy applications is the Barefoot College's latest initiative.
    - It was launched in 2005 and is now supported by the Ministry of External Affairs.
    - It caters to two groups of women — from India, and from Latin America, other parts of Asia, the Pacific Islands, and African countries.

Context

- A group of 45 women from 10 countries, 'solar mamas' who learnt the skills needed for the fabrication of solar panels, lights and photovoltaic circuits in a six-month-long training programme, were felicitated at a 'graduation ceremony' at the Barefoot College

Solid waste management policy- SC imposes costs on errant States, UT

Context

- With the states not bothered to implement solid waste management rules the court ordered that further construction activities be stopped in some States and Union Territories that remained unmindful of the interests of their people to live in a clean environment.

Details

- A Bench headed by Justice Madan B. Lokur imposed fines on some States and the Union Territory of Chandigarh for not placing on record their respective policies under the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.
    - Andhra Pradesh was ordered to pay ₹5 lakh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Chandigarh were imposed costs of ₹3 lakh each.
    - The amount would have to be deposited with the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee within two weeks and would be used for juvenile justice issues.
- Calling it a "shocking state of affairs" the SC said tragedy is that more than two-third of the States / Union Territories in the country have neither bothered to comply with the orders passed by the Court nor bothered to comply with the directions given by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India

Tiwa (Lalung)

- Tiwa (Lalung) is indigenous (Tibeto-Burman race) community inhabiting the states of Assam and Meghalaya (main region) and also found in some parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur in Northeast India.
- They are recognized as a Scheduled tribe within the State of Assam.
- Tiwa (meaning "the people who were lifted from below")
- A striking peculiarity of the Tiwa is their division into two sub-groups, Hill Tiwa and Plains Tiwas, displaying contrasting cultural features.
- The Tiwas burn grass to make a path, as they do for jhum cultivation (slash and burn) after growing paddy and pumpkin, chilli and other vegetables when they are not hunting.
- The Tiwas do not hunt in the breeding season of wild animals.

Replace 'Dalit' with 'SC', I&B Min Advisory Tells

Context

- In compliance with Bombay High Court's order, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has asked Indian television channels not to use the word "Dalit" for people belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) in its advisory.

Details

- The ministry has said that the media "may refrain from using the nomenclature 'Dalit' in compliance with the Bombay High Court order"
- The advisory issued by the government is derived from the Bombay High Court's order after a petition was filed by Pankaj Meshram, who sought removal of the word 'Dalit' from all government documents and communications.
- the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment had also issued a circular advising ministries, departments and state governments to drop the term 'Dalit' and use the constitutional term 'Scheduled Castes' instead for official communications.

Attempts in the past

- A decade ago, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes disfavored the use of 'Dalit', which it felt was unconstitutional.
    - This is because belonging to a 'Scheduled Caste' is a legal status conferred on members of castes named in a list notified by the President under Article 341 of the Constitution.
    - Therefore, arguably, 'Scheduled Caste' is the appropriate way to refer to this class of people in official communications and documents.

Issue Area

- 'Dalit' literally means 'downtrodden' or 'broken', but it is a word pregnant with meaning, reflecting the struggle of a community to reassert its identity and lay claim to the rights that were denied to them for centuries.
- However, it is inexplicable to oppose the use of the term 'Dalit' in the media and in non-official contexts — a nomenclature chosen and used by the community itself.
- Doing so lends itself to the charge that there is an attempt to deny the powerful and emotive meaning of the word Dalit.
- The term has evolved over a period of time and has come to symbolize different things in different contexts — self-respect, assertion, solidarity and opposition to caste oppression.
- In the past, Dalits were referred to as 'untouchables', but the official term during British rule was 'depressed classes'.
    - Mahatma Gandhi sought to remove the stigma of 'pollution' by using the term 'Harijans', or 'children of god'.
    - Gandhi in the article "What is in a name?" said 'Harijan' has sacred associations. It was suggested by a Harijan as a substitute for Asprishya (untouchable), Dalita (depressed), or for the different categories of 'untouchables' such as Bhangis, Mehtars, Chamars, Pariahs, etc."
    - In course of time, the community rejected this appellation as patronising and sanctimonious. It was only some decades ago that they began to refer to themselves as Dalits.

S.P. Gupta v. President of India (1981)

- The seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in S.P. Gupta v. President of India (1981) had observed that society is "pulsating with urges of gender justice, worker justice, minorities' justice, Dalit justice and equal justice between chronic un-equals."
- In using the term "Dalit justice", the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court validated the use of the term Dalit.

Conclusion

- The I&B Ministry's advisory is confusing as it uses the words "for all official transactions, matters", though the media's references to the community are usually beyond official contexts.
- The advisory must be withdrawn as there is no reason to tell the media how to do their job, even if it is couched in the form of gratuitous advice.

UN Report: A child under 15 dies every 5 seconds around the world

Context

- According to the new mortality estimates released by UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Division and the World Bank Group, an estimated 6.3 million children under 15 years of age died in 2017, or 1 every 5 seconds, mostly of preventable causes.

Stats

- In 2017, 2.5 million newborns died in their first month while 5.4 million deaths — occur in the first five years of life, with newborns accounting for around half of the deaths.
    - Globally, in 2017, half of all deaths under five years of age took place in sub-Saharan Africa, and another 30% in Southern Asia.
- Also, a baby born in sub-Saharan Africa or in South Asia was nine times more likely to die in the first month than a baby born in a high-income country
- The most risky period of child's life is the first month.
- The estimates also said that the number of children dying under five has fallen dramatically from 12.6 million in 1990 to 5.4 million in 2017.
- The number of deaths in older children aged between 5 to 14 years dropped from 1.7 million to under a million in the same period.

Disparities within countries

- Under-five mortality rates among children in rural areas are, on average, 50% higher than among children in urban areas.
- In addition, those born to uneducated mothers are more than twice more likely to die before turning five than those born to mothers with a secondary or higher education.

Causes

- Most children under 5 die due to preventable or treatable causes such as complications during birth, pneumonia, diarrhea, neonatal sepsis and malaria.
- Among children between 5 and 14 years of age, injuries become a more prominent cause of death, especially from drowning and road traffic.
    - Within this age group, regional differences exist, with the risk of dying for a child from sub-Saharan Africa 15 times higher than in Europe.

Conclusion

- There is an urgent need to being a stop to this and this requires radical reforms like structural changes in policy making and simple solutions like providing medicines, clean water, electricity and vaccines.

'Vantangiya' community

- The Vantangiya community comprises people who were brought from Myanmar to plant trees for afforestation during the colonial rule.
- They derive their name from a Burmese tradition of hill cultivation

- The community faces problems related to the use of natural forest produce like fruits, honey, wax, wood and leaves to meet their daily needs as the forests inhabited by them are not considered as revenue villages.
- Brought for an environmental cause by then British ViceRoy of India, Lord Mountbatten, the community was deprived of each and every basic facility and also the voting rights. The present population of this community is over 50,000 souls.

Background

- 'Tangia' is a distortion of the word for the Burmese technique of shifting hill plantation, Taungya, under which the space between the planted trees was used for growing seasonal crops by the labourers.
- Inspired by the Burmese, this was introduced to UP by the British around 1922 to offset the huge loss of trees due to expansion of the railways.
- Landless labourers, mostly from backward and Dalit castes, were deployed in these forests as settlers, earning them the name Vantangiya.
- For their services, the labourers were allowed to keep the produce of the crops but endured a nomadic existence as they had to shift from one location to another after every four years and did not enjoy any land rights

Rights denied

- The Vantangiya system continued after 1947 but in the 1980s, after the Forest Cooperation took shape, the forest working planning was scrapped and the Vantangiyas were served eviction notices and asked to give up all claims to the forest.
- Once known for nurturing the forests, they were branded encroachers.

Context

- Tinkonia is among the 23 Vantangiya villages in Gorakhpur and Maharajganj that have been declared as revenue villages by the Yogi Adityanath government, opening the doors of development in these neglected settlements for the first time since Independence.

Revenue village

- A revenue village is a small administrative region - a village with defined borders.
- One revenue village may contain many hamlets
- Conversion of tribal-dominated forest villages to revenue villages under the provisions of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act will enable the administration to adopt development measures such as setting up of schools, dispensaries, and other facilities in these villages.
- In revenue villages, the villagers are conferred with heritable but inalienable rights over the land, which have manifold benefits. The villagers can use this land as a guarantee for seeking bank loans to engage in any vocation

What were the concerns?

- Residents living in these areas do hot have proper infrastructure with most residents living in mud houses sheltered by tin roofs and with not a single toilet for a population of 3,300 people.
- The situation gets even more precarious during monsoons and medical emergencies, as the village does not have any health centre
- As they earlier fell under the Forest Department, these villages and their residents were deprived of basic government schemes and could not even get basic facilities, including BPL cards, employment guarantee projects, healthcare, education, electricity connections, pensions, loans and permanent housing.

Triple talaq is criminal offence

Context

- The Union Cabinet has cleared an ordinance that makes talaq-e-biddat, or instant triple talaq, a criminal offence that will attract a maximum jail term of three years.
- President Ram Nath Kovind later in the day gave his assent.
- The new law, however, incorporates safeguards, including a provision for bail to an accused before the start of the trial.

Why?

- There was an overpowering urgency and a compelling necessity to bring the ordinance as the practice continued unabated despite the Supreme Court's order last year.
- 201 cases had been reported from across the country after the Supreme Court banned triple talaq in August 2017.
- Since January 2017, 430 cases had been reported until September 13 this year.
- What is important is that the practice of triple talaq continues in spite of the Supreme Court having annulled it and the Lok Sabha having passed a Bill that is pending in the Rajya Sabha.

Provisions

- While instant triple talaq will continue to be a non-bailable offence — the police cannot grant bail at the police station — the accused can approach a magistrate for bail even before trial.
- A magistrate could exercise discretion to grant bail after hearing the wife. The magistrate would also have power to decide the quantum of compensation and subsistence allowance for the victim and her minor children.
- Another safeguard that had been added is that the police can lodge an FIR (first information report) only if the complaint is filed by the wife (victim), her blood relations or her relatives by virtue of her marriage. Non-relatives or neighbours cannot lodge a complaint under the proposed law.
- The offence of instant triple talaq has also been compoundable with a provision that allows the wife to withdraw a complaint or approach the magistrate for a dispute settlement.

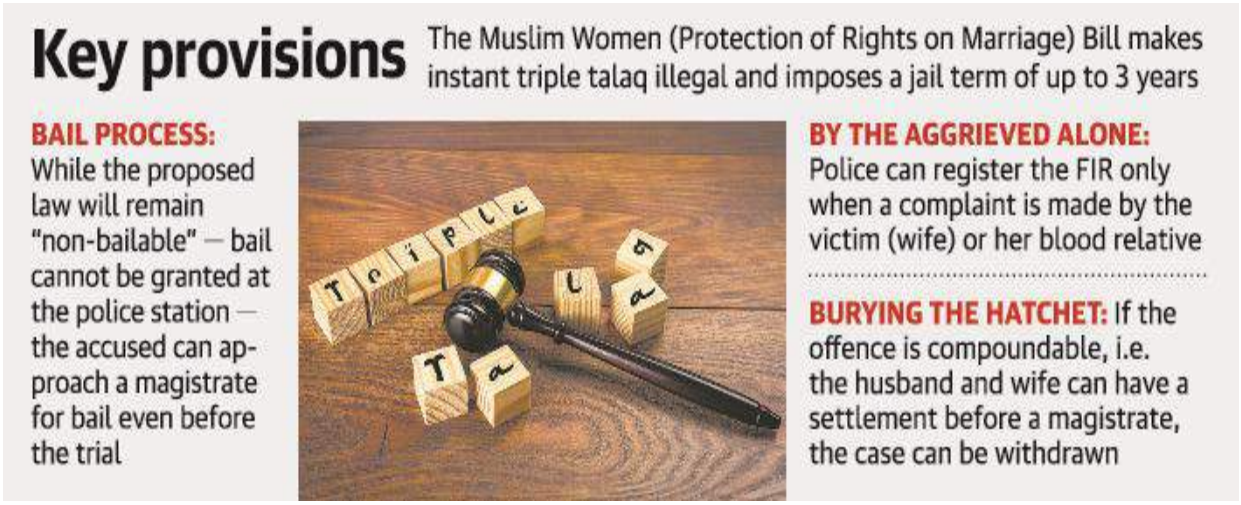
Criticisms

- Once the husband is in jail, who will pay maintenance and/or subsistence allowance to the woman and children?

- Why should the woman and children not have a right to proceed against the estate i.e. movable and immovable property of the husband?
- Why no similar provisions are made for Hindu men deserting their wives?
- Marriage is a civil contract in Islam and bringing penal provisions is wrong and unnecessary.
- The move would create problems for Muslim women without providing clarity on issues like property rights.

Global scenario

- India's neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are among the countries that have banned the practice of instant triple talaq prevalent among Muslims for divorce.
- India and 22 other countries have banned it.
- In Pakistan and Bangladesh, the law requires the man who wishes to divorce his wife to give the arbitration council a written notice of his having done so, and supply a copy of the same to his wife.
- In Pakistan, triple talaq was abolished when it issued its Muslim Family Law Ordinance in 1961.
- In Afghanistan, divorce through three pronouncements made in only one sitting is considered to be invalid.
- Sri Lanka's Marriage and Divorce (Muslim) Act, 1951, amended up to 2006, also prohibits triple talaq.



5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Apsara – U Reactor

Context

- Apsara – U Reactor Becomes Operational at Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay

Background

- "Research reactors are the back bone of Nuclear Programme" said Dr. Homi J. Bhabha, the father of Indian Nuclear programme
- "Apsara", the first research reactor in Asia became operational in Trombay campus of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in August 1956.
- After providing more than five decades of dedicated service to the researchers, the reactor was shut down in 2009.

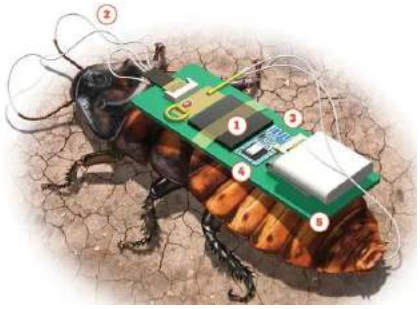
Details

- Apsara-upgraded made indigenously, uses plate type dispersion fuel elements made of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU).
- By virtue of higher neutron flux, this reactor will increase indigenous production or radio-isotopes for medical application by about fifty percent and would also be extensively used for research in nuclear physics, material science and radiation shielding.

BUFFALO Survey

- It is one of the missions coordinated by the NASA to explore the origins of the earliest galaxies.
- The Beyond Ultra-deep Frontier Fields And Legacy Observations (BUFFALO) survey will observe six massive galaxy clusters and their surroundings and allow astronomers to determine how rapidly galaxies formed in the first 800 million years after the Big Bang — paving the way for observations with upcoming observatories such as the James Webb Space Telescope.
- Its extended fields of view will also allow better 3-dimensional mapping of the mass distribution (of both ordinary and dark matter) within each galaxy cluster.

Cyborg Cockroach



1. Backpack
    - Researchers glue a 3D-printed mount onto the insect's back. This base connects the insect's body to a second block that holds the electronic components--including a printed circuit board that acts as a microcontroller.
2. Connectors
    - Tiny electrodes inserted and glued into the antennae stimulate the neurons that guide motor function. By zapping those neurons, researchers can control the cyborg's movements
3. Radio
    - A two-way radio and a chip antenna communicate data about the environment, location, and nearby sounds. Computer algorithms can use this information to coordinate multiple cyborg roaches for search-and-rescue missions
4. Microphone
    - Single or tri-directional microphones attached to the backpack capture sound and determine its direction. Algo-rithms analyze the sound to judge whether it likely came from humans. If so, the roach is de-ployed to further investigate.
5. Battery
    - A three-volt lithium-polymer battery, weighing just half a gram, powers the backpack. It can be disconnected for recharging; alternatively, a small solar panel can fit over the backpack and refuel a drained battery in less than two hours.

Significance

- It is powered by a tiny neuro-controller that could be used in search and rescue missions to find people trapped under collapsed buildings.

Focusing Optics X-ray Solar Imager, or FOXSI

- FOXSI is a sounding rocket mission. Derived from the nautical term 'to sound,' meaning to measure, sounding rockets make brief 15-minute journeys above Earth's atmosphere for a peek at space before falling back to the ground.
- FOXSI will travel above the shield of Earth's atmosphere, to stare directly at the Sun and search for nanoflares using its X-ray vision.
    - Nanoflares — small but intense eruptions — are born when magnetic field lines in the Sun's atmosphere tangle up and stretch until they break like a rubber band.
    - The energy they release accelerates particles to near light speed and according to some scientists, heats the solar atmosphere to its searing million-degree Fahrenheit temperature.
- FOXSI is the first instrument built specially to image high-energy X-rays from the Sun by directly focusing them
- All of this happens in colours of light so extreme that the human eye cannot see them.
- FOXSI is a collaboration between NASA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, and has co-investigators from the University of Minnesota; University of California at Berkeley; NASA's Goddard and Marshall space flight centers in Greenbelt, Maryland, and Huntsville, Alabama, respectively; the University of Tokyo; Nagoya University; the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan; and Tokyo University of Science.

Significance

- FOXSI rockets are smaller, cheaper and faster to develop than large-scale satellite missions, sounding rockets which offer a way for scientists to test their latest ideas and instruments and achieve rapid results.

Gaganyaan Mission

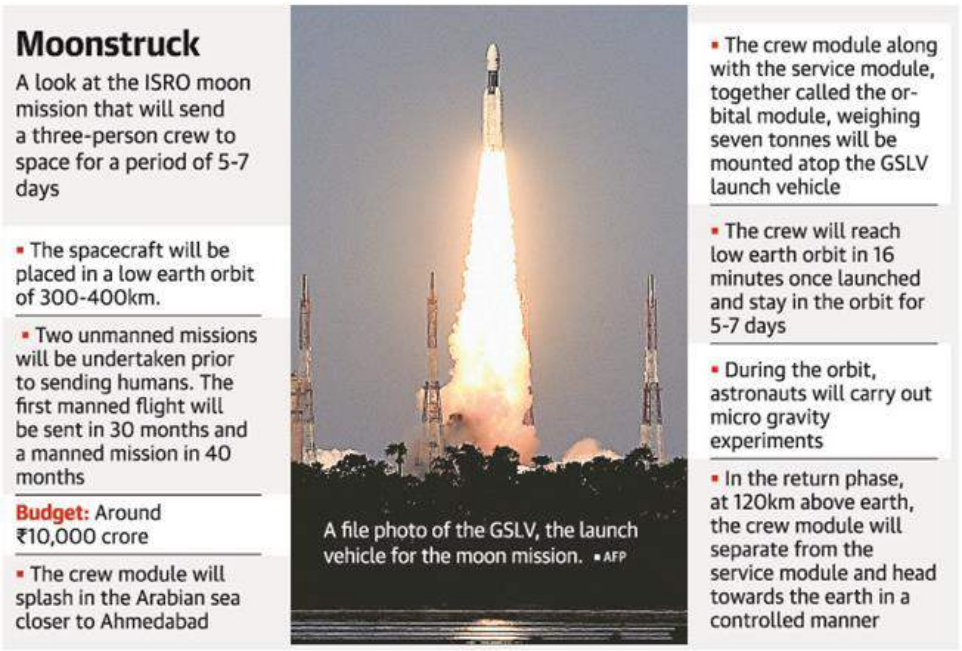
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is setting up a third launch pad at Sriharikota to undertake the Gaganyaan manned space flight programme.

Why?

- India had two launch pads currently, which are already full. A third launch pad is being set up for the human space flight.

Background

- In the Independence Day address this year from the Red Fort, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that an Indian will go to space by 2022: Gaganyaan mission.
- Following this, ISRO has announced an ambitious roadmap to put a three-man Indian crew in a low earth orbit for 5-7 days by the 75th Independence Day.
- If India does launch the Gaganyaan mission, it will be the fourth nation to do so after the United States, Russia and China.



Gaganyaan

- ISRO had begun work on the manned mission in 2004 and many of the critical technologies required for human spaceflight have already been validated through various tests — Space Capsule Recovery Experiment, Crew Module Atmospheric Re-Entry Experiment and Pad Abort Test.
- The 'pad abort' test or Crew Escape System is an emergency escape measure that helps pull the crew away from the launch vehicle when a mission has to be aborted.
- Space Capsule Recovery Experiment is intended to demonstrate the technology of an orbiting platform for performing experiments in micro gravity conditions.

- Crew module Atmospheric Re-entry Experiment would be used as a platform for testing the re-entry technologies envisaged for Crew Module (payload) including validating the performance of parachute-based deceleration system.

Hope Mars Mission/ Emirates Mars Mission

- It is a space exploration probe mission to Mars, set to be launched by the United Arab Emirates in 2020.
- Upon launch, it will become the first mission to Mars by any Arab or Muslim country.
- It is aimed at enriching the capabilities of Emirati engineers and increasing human knowledge about the Martian atmosphere
- Under the Emirates Mars Mission, the United Arab Emirates will send an uncrewed probe to Mars by 2020.

Scientific objectives

- It is aimed at providing a complete picture of the Martian atmosphere
- Data from the Hope probe will also help to model the Earth's atmosphere and study its evolution over millions of years
- All data gained from the mission will be made available to 200 universities and research institutes across the globe for the purpose of knowledge sharing.

International Center for Transformative AI (ICTAI)

Context

- NITI Aayog, Intel, and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) announced on 7th September that they are collaborating to set up a Model International Center for Transformative Artificial Intelligence (ICTAI) towards developing and deploying AI-led application-based research projects.

Details

- This initiative is part of NITI Aayog's 'National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence' Discussion Paper that focuses on establishing ICTAI in the country through private sector collaboration.
- Based in Bengaluru, the Model ICTAI aims to conduct advanced research to incubate AI-led solutions in three important areas – healthcare, agriculture and smart mobility – by bringing together the expertise of Intel and TIFR
- It aims to experiment, discover and establish best practices in the domains of ICTAI governance, fundamental research, physical infrastructure, compute and service infrastructure needs, and talent acquisition.
- Another key area of its focus will be collaboration with industry leaders, startups, and AI services and product companies to productize technologies and IP that are developed at the model ICTAI.
- The learning and best practices developed through this model ICTAI will be used by NITI Aayog to set up the future ICTAIs across country.

MINERVA-II1

- A rover (or sometimes planetary rover) is a space exploration vehicle designed to move across the surface of a planet or other celestial body.
- It is a compact rover consisting of two rovers.
- MinervaII1 is a 3.3 kg compact package consisting the two cookie-tin shaped rovers, Rover-1A and Rover-1B, which are now operating on the asteroid surface.

    - The MINERVA-II1 rovers separated from the Hayabusa2 spacecraft.
    - The hopping robots were stored at the base of the "mothership" Hayabusa2 in a drum-shaped container.
- MINERVA-II1 is the world's first rover to land on the surface of an asteroid. This is also the first time for autonomous movement and picture capture on an asteroid surface.
- MINERVA-II1 is therefore 'the world's first man-made object to explore movement on an asteroid surface'.

Robat

Context

- The study has been published in PLOS Computational Biology by Itamar Eliakim of Tel Aviv University, Israel, and his colleagues.

Details

- It is a fully autonomous, bat like terrestrial robot.
- It can (akin to bats) use echolocation to move through a novel environment while mapping it solely based on sound.
- Bats use echolocation to map novel environments while simultaneously navigating through them by emitting sound and extracting information from the echoes reflected from objects in their surroundings.
- Robat produces ultrasonic chirps from a tiny speaker mounted above its front wheels.
    - It listens for these sounds to echo back to it through two microphone “ears.”
    - Robat processes and makes decisions based on this information using a small onboard computer.

Significance

- The Robat could move autonomously through a novel outdoor environment and map it in real time using only sound.
- The growing use of autonomous robots has emphasized the need for new sensory approaches to facilitate tasks such as obstacle avoidance, object recognition and path planning.'

UTRAQ

Context

- India has launched its very own GPS module. Known as 'UTRAQ', the module was introduced at an event in New Delhi

Details

- MobileTek and Rama Krishna Electro Pvt Ltd's UTRAQ is a VTS module based on IRNSS to track locations.
- It is the first of its kind module that will primarily use an Indian satellite for navigation.
- It is an endeavour to provide an alternative to the Indian customers from the currently used GPS application that is working on US Satellites.

Functions

- L110 GNSS and L100 GNSS are the two modules launched.
    - The L110 GNSS module is a compact NavIC module
    - The L100 GNSS module is a smaller-sized POT (Patch on Top) IRNSS module.
- These modules can be used for different tasks other than tracking. These include ranging, command, control, timing and more.
- UTRAQ modules can be used for marine, aerial, terrestrial navigations. These modules can also be used for vehicle tracking and Geodetic data capture among others.

XMM-Newton

- XMM-Newton, also known as the High Throughput X-ray Spectroscopy Mission and the X-ray Multi-Mirror Mission, is an X-ray space observatory launched by the European Space Agency in 1999 on an Ariane 5 rocket.
- It is the second cornerstone mission of ESA's Horizon 2000 programme.
- Named after physicist and astronomer Sir Isaac Newton, the spacecraft is tasked with investigating interstellar X-ray sources, performing narrow- and broad-range spectroscopy, and performing the first simultaneous imaging of objects in both X-ray and optical

Context

- A UK team of astronomers report the first detection of matter falling into a black hole at 30% of the speed of light, located in the centre of the billion-light year distant galaxy PG211+143.
- The team, led by Professor Ken Pounds of the University of Leicester, used data from the European Space Agency's X-ray observatory XMM-Newton to observe the black hole.

Zoological Society of London honor for scientist

Context

- Zoological Society of London nominated Dr. Shaik for its fellowship for his work on Bio speleology

Biospeleology /cave biology

- It is the scientific study of cave organisms and ecosystems.
- They are collectively referred to as troglofauna.

Dr. Shaik

- He is faculty of the Acharya Nagarjuna University
- He has to his credit the discovery of 40 new cave fauna species, including five new genera. One micro-crustacean discovered by him even has his name — Andhracoides shabuddin .
    - He found the micro-crustacean named after him in the Guthikonda Cave in Guntur district.

    - It is because of all this that the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), which had fellows like Charles Darwin, and Alfred Russel Wallace and Ernst Mayr, nominated Dr. Shaik for its fellowship.
- He found another micro-crustacean of the same genus Andhracoides (named after Andhra Pradesh) in Belum cave and named it after German Speleologist Herbert Daniel Gebauer who mapped the famous cave.
    - Unlike the Belum cave, Borra cave is not in the ground but inside a hill. It goes three to four storeys down and opens to the Gostani River, which flows at the foot of the hill

6. SECURITY AND DEFENSE

Akash Upgraded version

Background

- DRDO developed Akash as part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme which was initiated in 1984.
- It is made by Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL).
- Akash is a surface-to-air missile defense system
- Akash can fly at supersonic speeds, ranging from Mach 2.8 to 3.5
- Akash has a range of 25 km and can engage multiple targets at a time in all-weather conditions.
- It has a large operational envelope, from 30 meter to a maximum of 20 km.
- Each regiment consists of six launchers, each having three missiles.
- Akash missile has an indigenous content of 96 per cent.

Enhanced features

- The upgraded version will include the seeker technology and possess a 360-degree coverage, and will be of compact configuration.
- It is operationally critical equipment, which will provide protection to vital assets

Aviaindra Exercise

- Exercise Aviaindra is an Air Force level exercise between India and the Russian Federation.
- First Aviaindra was conducted in 2014 and has been planned as a bi-annual exercise.
- The aim of the exercise is focused towards anti-terrorist operations in a bi-lateral scenario.
- The exercise would further enhance the co-operation and understanding each other's Concept of Operations.
- In addition to flying exercise, there would be formal interactions, discussions, exchange of ideas and friendly sports matches to enhance bonhomie between the two Air Forces.

'Bharat Ke Veer' portal

- Bharat Ke Veer is a fund-raising initiative by the Ministry of Home Affairs promoted by actor Akshay Kumar
- It is a web portal and mobile application launched on the occasion of Valour Day of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).
- The portal is an IT based platform, with an objective to enable willing donors to contribute towards the family of a brave heart who sacrificed his/her life in line of duty.
- This website is technically supported by National Informatics Centre (NIC) and powered by State Bank of India.

What it does?

- This domain allows anyone to financially support the brave hearts of his choice or towards the "Bharat Ke Veer" corpus.
- The amount so donated will be credited to the account of 'Next of Kin' of those Central Armed Police Force/Central Para Military Force soldiers.

- To ensure maximum coverage, a cap of 15 lakh rupees is imposed and the donors would be alerted if the amount exceeds, so that they can choose to divert part of the donation to another braveheart account or to the "Bharat Ke Veer" corpus.

Who will manage the fund?

- "Bharat Ke Veer" corpus would be managed by a committee made up of eminent persons of repute and senior Government officials, who would decide to disburse the fund equitably to the braveheart's family on need basis.

Trust status given for 'Bharat Ke Veer'

- The government granted status of a trust to 'Bharat Ke Veer', which aids families of paramilitary personnel killed in action. Contributions to Bharat Ke Veer has been exempted from Income Tax
    - Mr. Kumar and former national badminton champion Pullela Gopichand have been included as trustees
    - Under 80(G) which in effect means that all contributions to the trust will be exempted under the income tax.

Background:

- The Valour Day is celebrated in remembrance of an act of unparalleled bravery displayed by a small contingent of CRPF personnel, pitted against a full-fledged infantry brigade of Pakistani Army, trying to overrun their post, at Sardar Post, Rann of Kutch, Gujarat on April 09, 1965.
- They not only defeated the Pakistani brigade but also killed 34 Pakistani soldiers and captured 4 of them alive.
- The CRPF successfully defended the post till the arrival of reinforcements. The saga of valour of Sardar Post is a rich source of inspiration to the officers and men of CRPF and befittingly 9th April is observed as the "Valour Day".

Cattle smuggling on the border

Context

- Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi said he would inspect the entire stretch of the India-Bangladesh border to "find out the exact points" of cattle smuggling.

Facts

- Bangladesh and India share a 4,156 km (2,582 mi)-long international border, the fifth-longest land border in the world, including
    - 2,217 km in West Bengal.
    - 856 km in Tripura,
    - 443 km in Meghalaya,
    - 318 km in Mizoram,
    - 262 km in Assam,

Details

- Cattle smuggling cases across the border have come down in the last couple of years. This is due to arrest in cattle smuggling to strategic deployment of forces, use of sophisticated gadgets and presence of more Border Security Force personnel than before.

- But it still is a cause for concern. The issues that needs to be introspected is with customs about seizure and lack of transparency

Why is it done?

- It is sent across the borders for feeding the beef and leather industry
  - The demand for beef in Bangladesh is quite high but the supply is limited.
  - On the other hand, India is a cattle surplus country and the demand for beef is fairly low.
- The illegal cross-border cattle trade is said to be worth ₹5,000 crore annually, according to a 2017 report by a Central intelligence agency.
  - A calf sells for Rs 40,000 during festivals in Bangladesh, while the price on the Indian side is around Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000.
  - Fully-grown cattle sell for Rs 80,000 to Rs 1.15 lakh during the Eid in Bangladesh, while Indian prices of bovine are about Rs 40,000.

How is smuggling done?

- Officers in the border say cattle smugglers keep devising new methods of sending cattle to Bangladesh. The cattle smugglers usually operate after dark.
- A common practice was to torture or irritate the cattle to make them break through the fencing when the barbed wire fence ran 150 m from the zero line.
  - The methods included driving nails on the rumps of the cows,
  - Inserting chilli or petrol in their genitals to make them run in pain.
  - These would be applied on the cows making up the last row in a herd of 40-50 to induce a stampede.
- The barrier began to be upgraded with double-fencing in the early 2000s.
  - Bamboo crane technique has been effectively used. This entails tying a bamboo horizontally on a sturdy bamboo pole in a manner that it swivels.
  - Bangladeshi agents lower one end of the bamboo across the fence for their Indian associates to hang a cow, which is then swung up and across the fence to the other side.
  - Engaging snorkellers, usually children, who use the hollow of papaya stems to breathe underwater and steer the cattle across through rivers and channels flowing into Bangladesh.
- Security officials also say that there is a dedicated system for cattle smuggling.
  - There are 'linemen', whose task is to keep tabs on the movement of BSF troopers.
  - Then there are 'transporters' who ensure the cattle go across the border, and
  - There are 'stoners' who rain stones on the BSF party in the event of likely interventions.

Concerns

- Cattle smuggling is the "root cause" for firing incidents across the Indo- Bangla border.
- It can result in theft leading to clashes

Bangladesh's Position

- Bangladesh does not treat cattle smuggling from India as a crime.
  - In 1993, it gave the cattle trade a legal status by making it a source of revenue. A cattle "smuggler" becomes a "trader" once he is in Bangladesh and pays Taka 500 (Rs. 383) as Customs charges.
  - He only needs to state that he found the cattle "roaming near the border". This convenient arrangement has enabled Bangladesh to earn substantial revenue from cattle smuggling.

- The Customs levy is not the only source of revenue for Dhaka.
    - The bone and leather collected from the slaughtered cattle are used by the leather and ceramic industries. Ceramic is a major industry in Bangladesh

Measures taken

- Effective domination of the border by carrying out round the clock surveillance of the borders by patrolling nakas (border ambushes) and by deploying observation posts all along the International Border.
- Riverine segments of IB are being patrolled and dominated with the help of water crafts/speed boats/floating Border Out Posts (BOPs) of BSF water wings.
- Construction of fencing, patrol roads, floodlighting and additional Border Out Posts.
- Induction of force multipliers and Hi-Tech surveillance. Constant efforts are being made to procure the latest surveillance equipment's for further enhancing the border domination.
- Up-gradation of intelligence network and co-ordination with sister agencies. Conduct of special operations along with border.

Cyber University in Maharashtra

Context

- The Maharashtra Government has taken the first step towards setting up a varsity dedicated to mitigating cyber threats. It has set aside 80 crore for the first round of its funding

What was the need?

- A 2015 skill gap analysis for Maharashtra by the consultancy firm KPMG had pointed to a gap of 1.5 crore professionals in 10 sectors. Of these, there was a greater shortfall in the IoT and Cyber Forensics sectors. The new varsity will bridge this skill gap
- The current supply of cyber professionals in the country is about a lakh while the demand hovers around 30 lakh.
- A cyber-attack is taking place every 10 minutes as opposed to 12 minutes previously. The varsity will remedy this.

Details

- The new Cyber University will train 3,000 professionals to fight online space cyber-attacks, internet crimes, and conduct cyber forensics.
- It will also impart training in 15 other Internet of Things (IoT) areas such as Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- The government will provide different levels of training and enable affiliated colleges to impart certification for the 15 courses. The State will also supply infrastructure for training and education.

Cost of courses

- The varsity will provide for and prepare internet professionals on the lines of the Microsoft Certified Professional Program.
- The courses will cost less than 5 lakh for courses in data analytics, cloud computing, block chain, AI, cyber forensics and cyber investigations.

Background

- Maharashtra is already in the process of setting up its version of the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team to ward off external cyber threats.
- In 2016, the State had even appointed a consortium of M/s C-DAC (Centre for Development of Advanced Computing) and Railtel Corporation of India for the 838-crore project.
- The consortium in its analysis used the same technology as GARUDA, India's national grid computing initiative, and the Graphics and Intelligence Based Script Technology

GARUDA (Global Access to Resource Using Distributed Architecture)

- GARUDA initiative is a collaboration of the Scientific, Engineering and Academic Community to carry-out research and experimentation on a nationwide grid of computational nodes, mass storage that aims to provide the distributed data and compute intensive High Performance Computing solutions for the 21st century.
- It will deploy a distributed networked infrastructure for universities, research labs, industry and government throughout India.
- Department of Information Technology (DIT) has funded the Center for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to deploy the nation-wide computational grid, GARUDA
- It connects 45 institutions across 17 cities, with an aim to bring Grid computing to research labs, industries and academic institutions.
- GARUDA is part of the National Knowledge Network (NKN), an initiative to build a high-speed national network backbone with reliable quality of service (QoS) and security.

FTC-2000G

- It is a fixed-wing, multi-role combat plane tasked mainly with airstrikes against ground targets.
- It can also be used as a fighter jet or trainer aircraft, Aviation Industry Corp of China said
- Equipped with modern radar and fire-control systems, it is capable of staying airborne for three hours in a single operation and can carry as much as 3 tonnes of missiles, rockets or bombs
- It is also equipped with air-to-surface weapons.
- The aircraft has a maximum speed of 1.2 Mach, or 1,470 kilometers per hour, a maximum take-off weight of 11 metric tons, a maximum flight range of 2,400 km and an operational flight ceiling of 15 km.
- The aircraft features high operational economy and can carry out tasks in all weather conditions and at night.

Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)

- It was formed on April 13, 1980, under the leadership of Y. Ibohanbi.
- It is named after the historical name of Manipur, i.e. Kangleipak, the KCP is more concerned with the preservation of Meitei culture and demands secession of Manipur from India.

Objectives

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

Funding

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

Relations with other groups

- The group is also said to have established some links with certain Maoist groups of Nepal
- The group has expressed its willingness to cooperate and coordinate with the Communist Party of India-Maoist

Context

- Moirangthem Rana Pratap Rana alias Paikhomba member of banned terror outfit Kangleipak Communist Party— Peoples War Group arrested
- He was wanted by the National Investigation Agency and a reward of ₹2lakh was announced on his arrest.

Money laundering- India and Cyprus enter into agreement

Context

- India and Cyprus signed two agreements on combating money laundering and cooperation in the field of environment
- Mr. Kovind is in Cyprus on the first leg of his three-nation visit to Europe to continue India's high-level engagements with European countries.

Details

- The MoU was signed between Financial Intelligence Unit, India, and Unit for Combating Money Laundering of Cyprus
    - This agreement would further strengthen the institutional framework to facilitate investment cross-flows.
- Both countries also held discussions on issues of mutual interest, including promotion of business collaboration in the fields of IT and IT-enabled services, tourism, shipping and renewable energy

Offset Policy in Defence

- The Offset Policy was formally announced for the first time in 2005 and has been revised several times.
- It mandates foreign suppliers of equipment's to spend certain percent of the contract value in India. It was first revised in 2006 and then again in 2011 and in 2016. Sometimes this may take place with technology transfer.
- Offset policy necessarily aims at acquisition and development of the state of the art technologies and create world class defence production industry which should be able to meet both domestic and export requirements of the country.

Details

- The key objectives of the Defence Offset Policy is to leverage the capital acquisitions to develop Indian defence industry by fostering development of internationally competitive enterprises; augmenting capacity for research and development in defence sector and to encourage development of synergistic sector like civil aerospace and internal security.
- The offset can be discharged by many means such as direct purchase of eligible products/services, FDI in joint ventures and investment towards equipment and transfer of technology.
- As per Defence Offset Guidelines, the foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) is free to select any Indian company as its offset partner**.**

- All successful offset programmes have certain common well defined characteristics, purposeful selection in consonance with well-defined objectives, hard negotiations, detailed planning and close oversight.
- It is being deduced that Offset Policy aims at defence industrial development of country.

Concerns

- Equipment Acquisition in Jeopardy: In their enthusiasm to obtain order, many vendors fail to grasp the full implications of offset liabilities. They tend to take obligation lightly and do not make adequate budgetary provisions.
- Time Delays: Negotiations and deliberations may hinder fast implementation and may cause undue delay
- Offset as Incidental Considerations: Offset will work best when aspirations of both the vendor and buyer country are fulfilled and resulting in a win-win situation for both seller and buyer. An analysis of buyers' perspective on offsets to gain maximum advantages and vendors' reluctance to give away too much may lead to the impression that offsets aspirations of buyer and possible approach towards same by vendor are dichotomous.
- Technology received in few countries also show that it was outdated and did not improve competitions of indigenous industry.
- Offsets did not create new markets for local produce.

Recommendations

- Offset should not delay main acquisition nor should it drive acquisition of equipment and technology.
- Wherever feasible, we should resort to direct offsets.
- Technology being obtained through offsets should be both relevant and contemporary.

Parakram Parv

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the annual Combined Commanders Conference in the Air Force Station Jodhpur and stressed on the need for "jointness" among the three services and the need for the forces to "work together"

Details

- Mr. Modi inaugurated 'Parakram Parv' an exhibition at the military station, Jodhpur, to mark the second anniversary of the surgical strikes carried out by the Indian Army across the LoC.
- The exhibition showcases captured terrorist's weapons that have been brought from Jammu and Kashmir, among others, in addition to short videos of the surgical strikes of 2016.
- The event is also being celebrated at 53 locations in 51 other cities
- The defense ministry conducted the event with the army, air force and navy

What is a surgical strike?

- A surgical strike is a military attack which is intended to demolish something specific.
- It is done with an intention to not harm the surroundings.
- No damage is intended to any structure, building etc.
- These are methodically planned and coordinated on various levels.

- A surgical strike also needs Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) support from the commanders.

Criticism

- The celebrations have drawn severe criticism from serving and retired personnel who said Such actions by the armed forces are not meant to be celebrated in this manner

Prahaar Missile

Context

- India successfully test-fired its indigenously developed surface-to-surface short-range tactical ballistic missile 'Prahaar' from the Odisha

Details

- It is developed by DRDO
- It is capable of filling the gap between the multi-barrel rocket system 'Pinaka' and medium-range ballistic missile 'Prithvi'.
- It is a solid-fuelled short-range missile fitted with inertial navigation system
- The missile is equipped with state-of-the-art navigation, guidance and electromechanical actuation systems with advanced on board computer.
- Various tracking radars as well as electro-optic equipment were engaged to track and monitor the missiles trajectory

VC 11184

- It is a missile tracking ocean surveillance ship being constructed by Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) for Indian Navy.
- It will be the first of its kind ocean surveillance ship being built as part of the efforts under the NDA government to strengthen the country's strategic weapons programme.
- It has the capacity to carry 300-strong crew with hi-tech gadgets and communication equipment, powered by two diesel engines, and a large deck capable of helicopter landing.
- It is being built for the National Technical Research Organization, the technical intelligence agency working directly under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office and the National Security Adviser.
- This would put India in the elite of club of a few countries that have such a sophisticated ocean surveillance ship

7. ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) accused of being lax in enforcement of rules

Context

- Union Women and Child Development Minister Maneka Gandhi has locked horns with the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), accusing carelessness in law implementation that specify how wild animals can be depicted in films and television programmes.

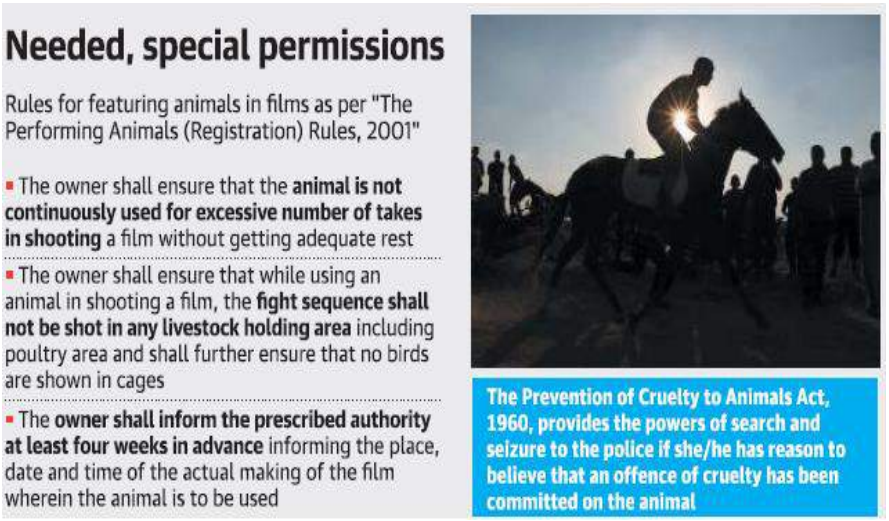
Animal Welfare Board of India

- It is a statutory advisory body on Animal Welfare Laws and promotes animal welfare in the country. Established in 1962 under Section 4 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960
- It was started under the stewardship of Late Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, well known humanitarian.
- Its functions are to look into
    - that animal welfare laws in the country are diligently followed,
    - to provide grants to Animal Welfare Organizations and
    - advising the Government of India on animal welfare issues,

Details

- The board is India's apex body for ensuring that animals are not mistreated.
- There were "blatant errors" by the AWBI subcommittee that screens applications from film-makers.
- The committee did not seek details of the species being used, which were required to determine whether they were protected.
    - It had even allowed their depiction in scenes that could promote cruelty to animals.
- It cites an instance of approval given for a scene showing animal sacrifice, which is against the Supreme Court's orders.

Steps to be taken



Aravallis Ecological damage

Context

- The Supreme Court ordered the demolition of structures built illegally by builders in the protected forests of the Aravallis, noting that ecological damage done by colonizers to the ancient hills was irreversible and "quite frightening."

Details

- All structures built after August 18, 1992 in the area known as 'Kant Enclave' at Anangpur in Faridabad district of Haryana should be demolished.
- The court, however, ordered not to disturb constructions made between April 17, 1984 and August 18, 1992.

Aravalli

- It is a composite Sanskrit word from "ara" and "vali", literally means the "line of peaks"
- It is the oldest range of Fold Mountains in India.
- It is a range of mountains starting in North India from Delhi and passing through southern Haryana through to Western India across the states of Rajasthan and ending in Gujarat
- Guru Shikhar, a peak in the Arbuda Mountains of Rajasthan, is the highest point of the Aravalli Range.
- It consists of two main sequences formed in Proterozoic eon, metasedimentary rock (sedimentary rocks metamorphised under pressure and heat without melting) and metavolcanic rock (metamorphised volcanic rocks) sequences of the Aravalli Supergroup and Delhi Supergroup.

Bangkok Climate Change Conference

Context

- There was a six-day meeting, which was scheduled to step up progress in the battle against rising global carbon emissions by adopting a completed text that could be presented at the COP24 conference in Katowice, Poland.

Background-Paris Agreement

- A primary objective of the 2015 Paris agreement, to which 190 nations subscribe, is to limit the global temperature increase by 2100 to less than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and as close as possible to 1.5 degrees, which is vital to the survival of island nations threatened by rising seas.
- Under the pact concluded in Paris, rich countries pledged to raise $100 billion a year by 2020 to help developing countries reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and aid populations to cope with extreme events such as floods, droughts and storms.

Developed countries forgetting their moral obligation

- The carbon emissions released by the developed countries decades before has raised living standards for their citizens but contributed heavily to the accumulated carbon dioxide burden.
    - The carbon in atmosphere is currently at 410 parts per million, up from 280 ppm before the industrial revolution.
- By trying to stall climate justice to millions of poor people in vulnerable countries, the developed nations are refusing to accept their responsibility for historical emissions of GHGs.
- Retaining status quo and Obstructing the transition to a carbon-neutral pathway is short sightedness because the losses caused by weather events are proving severely detrimental to all economies

- This has led to fears that not enough action is being taken after the failure to reach an intended agreement and guidelines for implementation.

China and India are vanguards among the developing countries

- There is international pressure on China and India to cut GHG emissions. Both countries have committed themselves to a cleaner growth path.
- India, which reported annual CO2 equivalent emissions of 2.136 billion tonnes in 2010 to the UNFCCC two years ago, estimates that the GHG emissions intensity of its GDP has declined by 12% for the 2005-2010 period.
- As members committed to the Paris Agreement, China and India have the responsibility of climate leadership in the developing world, and have to green their growth.
- So any implementation by the developing countries would need a supportive framework in the form of a rulebook that binds the developed countries to their funding pledges, provides support for capacity building and transfer of green technologies on liberal terms.

Concerns

- Failed agriculture in populous countries will drive more mass migrations of people, creating conflict.
- Progress was made in this conference on most issues but nothing was finalized.
- Difficulties over the issue of raising funds to help poorer nations.
- The US has announced its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement but still negotiates, weakening international cooperation by not contributing to finance and technology transfer to developing countries

Conclusion

- This is the time for the world's leaders to demonstrate that they are ready to go beyond expediency and take the actions needed to avert long-term catastrophe.

Black Spotted Turtles/ Geoclemys Hamiltonii

Context

- A recent report by TRAFFIC says India accounts for 29% of black spotted turtles (Geoclemys hamiltonii) seized from across seven countries in South Asia

Details

- IUCN: Vulnerable
- Countries occurrence: Bangladesh; India; Nepal; Pakistan
    - In India, the species is distributed across the north, northeast and a few parts of central India in States such as West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, and parts of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Meghalaya.
- The medium-sized freshwater turtle has a black shell with yellow streaks.

Stats

- The highest number of seizures occurred in India, accounting for a total of 3,001 (29.33%) specimens.
- Of the 53 seizures across these seven countries, 38% (or 20) seizures were from India.
- India is followed by Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand (1,995 specimens or 19%) and Hong Kong (1,775 specimens or 17%), followed by Bangladesh (1,197 specimens or 12%).

- The remaining specimens were seized from China, Pakistan and Singapore.

Smuggling hotspots

- Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra fall completely out of the distribution range of the species, it proves that these States are used as trade routes. Seizure data indicates that black spotted turtles are transported to Chennai by car or train, and subsequently smuggled to other parts of the region.
- Chennai has been identified as a major transit hub for illegal international trade in the Indian star tortoise, another species smuggled in large numbers.
- The report describes the India-Bangladesh border, part of the species' natural range, as another hotspot for trade in the black soft-shelled turtle.

Concerns

- The species was once smuggled for its meat and is now sought after as an exotic pet.
- Of the 55 suspects arrested for smuggling black spotted turtles, the number of known convictions was only 20, showing lacunae in the preparation of cases, and in procedural lapses in prosecution.

Recommendation

- increasing public awareness
- Better law enforcement and cooperation among international authorities.

Bonnethead Shark / Shovel Head

- IUCN: Least Concern
- It is a very abundant, small hammerhead that is found in shallow estuaries and bays on the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean coasts of the Americas as well as in the Gulf of Mexico.

Context

- The bonnethead shark, a small member of the hammerhead family, was long thought to be a strict carnivore that would occasionally ingest greens purely by accident but scientists say it follows an omnivorous diet in which seagrass plays a key nutritional role.

Details

- This is the first species of shark ever to be shown to have an omnivorous digestive strategy.
- Not all carnivores can digest plant material efficiently, but sharks fed with the seagrass-heavy diet all gained weight. Although sharks lack a secondary jaw that many herbivores use to chew plants, they have highly acidic stomachs which may aid digestion.
- Bonnethead sharks are not only consuming copious amount of seagrass but they are actually capable of digesting and assimilating seagrass nutrients, making them clear omnivores
- Seagrass can form up to 62% of the bonnethead diet, alongside their preferred meal of crustaceans and molluscs.
- The animals were found to be as good at digesting fibre and organic matter as young green sea turtles — a species that transforms from eating an omnivorous diet in youth to committed vegetarianism in adulthood.

Seagrass Meadows

- Growing in salty and brackish waters, seagrass meadows are the most widespread coastal ecosystem on Earth.
- They help filter water and absorb excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- They also provide a home and nurseries for thousands of fish and invertebrates

Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH)

Context

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, has approved continuation of the CSS-IDWH beyond the 12thPlan period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

Details

- The Scheme consists of
    - Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger (CSS-PT),
    - Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-DWH)
    - Project Elephant (CSS-PE).
- The implementation of the schemes would be done through the respective States in designated Tiger Reserves, Protected Areas and Elephant Reserves.

Significance

- A total of 18 tiger range States, distributed in five landscapes of the country would be benefitted under the Project Tiger scheme. Similarly, for other two schemes, the coverage is entire country in case of Development of Wildlife Habitats (DWH) and 23 elephant range States for Project Elephant.
- It would foster wildlife conservation in general with specific inputs for tiger in Project Tiger area and elephant in Project Elephant area.
- The schemes would result in overall strengthening/ consolidation of tiger, elephant and wildlife conservation in the country.
- The schemes would address the human wildlife conflict effectively.
- These schemes would generate employment opportunities resulting in economic upliftment of people in and around tiger reserves/ Protected Areas besides leading to reduction in natural resource dependency with substitution by clean energy use.
    - It will generate direct employment of about 30 lakh mandays annually which shall include many local tribes besides non-tribal local workforce. People living in vicinity would also get indirect benefits. Local populace would get opportunities to serve as guides, driver, and hospitality personnel and in other ancillary jobs.
    - These schemes would foster imparting various skills towards making people self-dependent through various eco-development projects, thereby enabling them to go for self-employment.

Climate change affecting the flora and fauna of the high Himalayas

Context

- A new study by Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has revealed that the upper reaches of the Himalayas are warming, something that will put local flora and fauna at tremendous risk.

Conditions in this region

- It was conducted in the basin of the Bhagirathi River near Gaumukh in Uttarakhand. The study region is located at an altitude between 3500-4500 metres.
- At 4,500 metres, the maximum temperature touches 5 degrees Celsius, while the minimum plunges to -14.
- At 3,500 metres, the maximum temperature is 10 degrees Celsius, while the minimum is around -2.5 degrees Celsius.

What did results conclude?

- The study has revealed that there has been a rise of at least 0.5 degrees Celsius in the temperature of the area, accompanied by an almost 10 per cent variation in humidity levels.
- Flowering patterns and budding of leaves are now happening in May instead of June.
- Rains are happening in late September which is unusual since this is the autumn season.
- In response to the changed temperatures in alpine meadows which are the grazing and hunting sites for the species inhabiting the region, premature budding and flowering happens in plants.
- This leads to a change in the activities of insects.
    - It is also very likely that pest populations such as those of locusts and grasshoppers could increase with the increase in temperatures.
- In response, birds will have to change their patterns. Therefore, the entire cycle of an area changes

Impacts

- Flora affected include the Himalayan birch, White lily, Tibetan sea buckthorn, Spotted heart orchid, Himalayan fir and Sikkim Rhubarb.
- Mammals likely to be affected include the Musk deer, Kashmir stag and Himalayan mouse hare.
    - Under a high emissions scenario, large areas of existing snow leopard habitat may be rendered unsuitable.
- Alterations of temperature and precipitation regimes may result in a spread of disease and parasites into new regions or produce an increase in the incidence of disease, which, in turn, would reduce animal productivity and possibly increase animal mortality.
    - This may contribute to an increase in disease spread, including zoonotic diseases
- With the onset of more the more palpable effects of Climate Change in the Himalayas, changed predator-prey relations could also become a feature, with increases or decreases in the populations of multiple species, leading to changed equations in the food web.

Colobopsis Explodens

- C. explodens are found in the tropical jungles of Borneo. They live in colonies of thousands, high up in the treetops
- Colobopsis explodens ants live up to their name — they explode! The blast releases poisonous yellow goo that stops their enemies in their tracks.
- It latches onto an enemy and squeezes its own abdominal muscles hard enough that its backside bursts open, releasing the goo. It sacrifices itself to kill its rival.

Coral Ecosystems

Context:

- Coral reefs, which are also called the 'rainforests of the oceans', represent one of the most diverse ecosystems on earth, and they play a very significant role in maintaining marine biodiversity. But there wellbeing is gravely threatened by coral bleaching which is caused by climate change and water pollution.
- A team from National Centre for Coastal Research, Chennai, plans to work on coral monitoring and restoration in the Gulf of Mannar region.

Key Points:

- The team plans to assess the location and coverage of corals through remote sensing, and then study how the sediment affects the coral reef.
- The team will also set up an acquatech park which will help the local people rear marine ornamental fish towards a sustainable livelihood.
- The group has prior experience in studying corals across the country. They have successfully transplanted and nurtured corals in the Lakshadweep region. Now they are set to work in the Gulf of Mannar.

Coral bleaching:

- An increase in sea surface temperatures leads to coral bleaching and the breaking of the symbiotic relationship that corals have with the unicellular algae dinoflagellates.
- All corals are not equally sensitive. The most vulnerable are the branching corals, for example, Acropora species, and the least susceptible are the massive ones, for example Favia species.
- Coral reefs in India are only seen in some localities around the Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Kutch, Lakshadweep islands and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In many of these places, bleaching of corals and related cnideria species such as giant clam and tentacle sea anemone have been observed
- However, constructive interventions exist for this problem. The methods include reducing harvest of herbivorous fish and minimizing anthropogenic causes of bleaching.
- The National Centre for Coastal Research, which comes under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, conducted a mapping of corals for Gulf of Kutch, Gulf of Mannar, Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar islands over a period of five years, from 2000 to 2005. Their results were startling, as they found less than 40% of the coral reefs in India were still alive.
- From 2005 to present, the team, with support from Department of Science and Technology, has surveyed the area around Agatti and Kavaratti islands in the Lakshadweep, and in an area approximately one acre, transplanted branching corals, massive corals and foliac corals.
- Over the last decade, this region has seen restoration of live corals in these areas.

Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project

- It is an initiative being undertaken by the Central Water Commission (CWC), Government of India with World Bank loan assistance, to improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner, and to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating Implementing Agencies across participating States as well as in the CWC.

Objective:

- Component-I: – Rehabilitation of Dam and its Appurtenant Structures,
- Component-II: – Institutional Strengthening and
- Component-III: – Project Management.

The Scheme envisages comprehensive rehabilitation of 198 existing dam projects located in seven states of India namely, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Jharkhand (Damodar Valley Corporation) and Uttarakhand (Uttarakhand Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited).

Eight avian species declared "extinct" in new study

Context

- Scientists have declared eight species of birds to be extinct in what are being seen as the first avian extinctions of the 21st century

Which are these birds

- The Spix's macaw, a type of parrot, was last sighted in the wild in 2000.
- The Alagoas foliage-gleaner, a small forest bird, became extinct in 2011.
- The cryptic treehunter has not been seen in the wild since 2007, when its forest home in Murici in north-eastern Brazil was destroyed and replaced with sugar cane plantations and pasture.
- The fourth Brazillian species to go extinct is the Pernambuco pygmy-owl, a 15cm-tall owl that eats insects and hasn't been seen in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco since 2002.
- The fifth South American species on the list is the glaucous macaw, once found in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil before its palm grove habitat was destroyed to make space for farming.
- Another non-South American species on the list is the poo-uli, or black-faced honeycreeper, which was found on the island of Maui in Hawaii but was last sighted in 2004.

Details

- The study was conducted by non-profit "Birdlife International" and was published in the journal Biological Conservation.
- Four out of the eight species declared extinct belong to Brazil.

Causes

- Five of these new extinctions have occurred in South America and have been attributed by scientists to deforestation to make way for large-scale agriculture and industrial activities

Fluoride contamination

Context

- School Children in Odisha's Nuapada district are facing the brunt of Flouride Contamination with potable water sources in as many as 54 schools and anganwadi premises testing for fluoride presence beyond permissible limits.

Details

- Laboratory tests certified by the National Rural Drinking Water Programme under the Union Drinking Water and Sanitation Ministry found 5.25 mg per litre fluoride content in water sourced from a tube well in the school.
- Consumption of water having fluoride content above 1.5 mg per litre is considered dangerous to health.
- In 2018-19, drinking water sources in eight schools in Nayagarh, seven in Balangir and eight in Kalahandi districts were found to be fluoride contaminated.

Health Issues

- Prolonged consumption of fluoride-contaminated water leads to dental and skeletal fluorosis.
- Mottled Teeth and crippled backbone and limbs are manifestation of the disease.
- Bones in children are in formation stage while fluoride tends to damage bones

Way forward

- It is very important to make immediate alternative arrangement for safe drinking water for students.

Indian Roofed Turtle (Pangshura Tecta)

- IUCN: least concern
- Countries occurrence: Bangladesh; India; Nepal; Pakistan
- It can be distinguished by the distinct "roof" at the topmost part of the shell.

Context

- A small population of Indian Roofed Turtles (Pangshura tecta) in the Lota Devi temple pond in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, was struggling to survive due to the pollution caused by devotees throwing oil, incense sticks, flowers and other ritual offerings into the small waterbody.

Concerns

- The dissolved oxygen in the pond was very low and contamination of the water was resulting in the death of turtles.

How was the issue addressed?

- The offerings made by the devotees in the pond left it very polluted. So, an idol of Vishnu in his Kurma (turtle) avatar was installed at the temple complex.
- This symbolic Kurma idol is placed on an altar just outside the fenced area, where devotees can place their offerings rather than directly polluting the pond

International Whaling Commission

- The IWC was set up under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling which was signed in Washington DC in 1946.
- The preamble to the Convention states that its purpose is to provide for the proper conservation of whale stocks and thus make possible the orderly development of the whaling industry.
- An integral part of the Convention is it's legally binding 'Schedule.'
    - The Schedule sets out specific measures that the IWC has collectively decided are necessary in order to regulate whaling and conserve whale stocks.
    - Unlike the Convention, the Schedule can be amended and updated when the Commission meets
- These measures include catch limits (which may be zero as it the case for commercial whaling) by species and area, designating specified areas as whale sanctuaries, protection of calves and females accompanied by calves, and restrictions on hunting methods.
- The headquarters of the IWC is in Impington, near Cambridge, England

Context

- A proposal to create a whale sanctuary in the South Atlantic was defeated at a meeting in Brazil of the International Whaling Commission, amid a clash between countries that think whales can be hunted sustainably and others that want more conservation measures

Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUSHR)

- Union Science & Technology minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan today inaugurated a novel holistic Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUSHR) project at Sun Dial Park in New Delhi that produces clean water which is reused for various purposes, while simultaneously recovering nutrients and energy from the urban waste water, thus converting the Barapullah drain into profitable mines.
- This plant, can convert 10 lakh litre of sewage into clean water and generate 3 tonnes of biofuel, will be scaled up and will become a model for example for the whole world.
- In another unique initiative at the site Department of Biotechnology has undertaken afforestation of marshy flood plains, degraded and unusable land and planted 2281 plant and tree species.
- This not only cleans the area, mitigates mosquito breeding but also purifies the air and soil.
- The species and the spacing of the planted material is carefully planned using a technology which allows these trees to grow rapidly and within a short span of two-three years recover a unique ecosystem of birds, insects and animals.

Man-Animal conflict Costs

Context

- Biological Conservation, an international journal on conservation science has published a study, which says there are inconsistencies in compensation awarded for human-wildlife conflict — ranging from crop loss to human death — across the country.

Details

- Scientists at Bengaluru's Centre for Wildlife Studies, who analyzed cases of compensation for crop raiding, livestock loss and human injury and death reported to the government between 2010 to 2015.

The Wildlife that caused losses in 29 States included

- Elephants that raid crop fields,
- Tigers and leopards that preyed on cows and goats, and
- Other species ranging from crocodiles to monkeys that cause injury and property damage.

State Compensation

- It said only Twenty-two States compensated people for crop loss.
- While a majority of the States awarded compensation for loss of livestock, human injury and death, only 18 (62%) did so for property damage.
- The complete data for 18 States in 2012-2013 alone reveals that people reported a total of 78,656 cases, for which payments totalled to about ₹ 38 crore. Yet, even these numbers are an underestimate of the extent of conflict: many people do not report their losses, some States lack compensation policies
- Although the majority of claims countrywide were related to crop loss, seven States — including Gujarat and Rajasthan — still do not provide crop compensation.

Concerns

- The ramifications of losses in arid States where farmers rely on just a single crop for survival would be high. Such discrepancies in eligibility and procedure, by promoting selective tolerance and protection of wildlife, could be detrimental to conservation efforts.

Steps to be taken

- Policies must be standardized across State lines in a manner equitable to both citizens and wildlife
- Empowering people to cope with their losses is needed if we are to see global conservation icons such as elephants and tigers thrive amidst people.

Nahargarh Biological Park

Context

- Rajasthan Forest Minister Gajendra Singh Khimsar inaugurated the state's first lion safari at Nahargarh Biological Park.

Details

- The park is located on the Delhi-Jaipur National Highway, nearly 12 kilometers from Jaipur near the foothills of Aravalli
- The Park is famous for its vast flora and fauna, and its main aim is to conserve it. It also doubles up as a great place to educate people and conduct research on existing flora and fauna.

Plogging

- Plogging is a combination of jogging with picking up litter
- It started as an organised activity in Sweden around 2016 and spread to other countries in 2018, following increased concern about plastic pollution.
- As a workout, it provides variation in body movements by adding bending, squatting and stretching to the main action of running

Context

- A "plogging drive" to inculcate a habit of picking up litter from path while walking or jogging among citizens was launched by New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)
- Titled Plog Run, the initiative by Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara palike (BBMP) will also be part of cleanliness drive this Gandhi Jayanthi

Details

- The "plogging drive" is a part of the 'Swachhta-hi-Sewa Pakhwada', which is being celebrated on the occasion of 4th Anniversary of the 'Swachh Bharat Mission'.
- The event also saw participation of schoolchildren in the form of nukkad natak (street play) centering on the theme of "Swachhta".

Pondicherry shark/Long nosed shark

Context

- Field biologists from the EGREE Foundation have spotted 'Pondicherry shark', an endangered species protected under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, near the Kumbhabhishekam

Details

- Scientifically known as Carcharhinus hemiodon, it belongs to the Carcharhinidae family with a growth of 3.3 feet.
- IUCN: Critically Endangered
- Countries occurrence: China; India; Indonesia (Kalimantan); Malaysia; Oman; Pakistan
- They are Known as 'Pala Sora' in the local parlance, the Pondicherry Shark is on the verge of extinction

Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary/ Kulik Bird Sanctuary

- It is situated near Raiganj in Uttar Dinajpur district in West Bengal.
- The sanctuary has one of the highest numbers of Openbill stork population not only in India but in Asia and this makes the sanctuary unique.
- It draws its name from the river Kulik, attracts a large number of tourists every year, including birdwatchers and wildlife enthusiasts.

Context

- The number of winged visitors at the Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary has crossed all previous records.
- As per a census carried out by the State Forest Department, the wildlife sanctuary, spread over 130 hectares, recorded 98,532 birds in 2018.

Details

- Birds visit the Raiganj Wildlife Sanctuary in June and stay till November, when the temperature drops.
- In the year 2012-13, the number of migratory birds was about 58,000. Not only has the number of birds increased, but the number of species has also increased from 50 in 2012-13 to over 120 this year.
- The presence of water bodies, there is a lot of food available for the birds. They primarily feed on fishes and snails,
- Of the new bird species visiting the sanctuary for the first time in 2018 are the Asian Paradise Flycatcher and Indian Pitta

Indian paradise flycatcher

- It is a medium-sized passerine bird native to Asia
- Sometimes known as perching birds or less accurately – as songbirds, passerines are distinguished from other orders of birds by the arrangement of their toes (three pointing forward and one back), which facilitates perching.
- IUCN: Least Concern
- It is native to the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and Myanmar

Indian pitta

- It inhabits scrub jungle, deciduous and dense evergreen forest. Breeding in the forests of the Himalayas, hills of central and western India, they migrate to other parts of the peninsula in winter.
- IUCN: Least Concern

RE-INVEST

- It aims at accelerating the worldwide effort to scale up renewable energy and connect the global investment community with Indian energy stakeholders

- It will provide a great opportunity to various organizations to showcase their business strategies, achievements and expectations.
- It would facilitate collaboration and cooperation with key stakeholders in India, which has today emerged as one of the world's largest renewable energy markets.

River pollution: NGT directs States to act

Context

- Taking suo motu cognisance on the increase in polluted river stretches in the country, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed all States and Union Territories to prepare action plans within two months.

Background

- As the Ganga emerges from the glaciers and glides along the foothills of the mighty Himalayas through the towns and cities with their sprawling ghats, engineered embankments, hydroelectric dams, and interrupted flows at barrages, the icy chilliness of its waters is lost.
- Pilgrims swarm its bank to pay obeisance to the holy river but the river continues to be treated as a dump yard for human waste, dirt and rubbish.
- Civilisations have developed along its banks but cities and villages today dispose of industrial and municipal waste making it the second most polluted river in the world.

Big Dams add to River Pollution

- The first impact is through fishes. Fishes have the capacity to digest the organic matter. Large numbers of fishes can be seen swimming in the clean waters of the ponds. They have eaten up the organic matter in the pond and the water has become clean
    - Rivers are the habitat of the fishes. Many of these migrate from one stretch of the river to other.
        - For example, the famous Mahseer of Uttarakhand moves up to the cold areas for laying eggs. Then the hatched fish lings flow down with the water to the plains. They grow to maturity in the plains.
        - Mature fishes again move upstream to their spawning areas.
    - This up and down migration is central to the health of the Mahseer. Dams do not allow fishes to move from plains to hills and therefore the species decreases in the river.
    - Mahseer was previously found up to Uttarkashi. Now it is not found in upstream of Tehri
    - Hilsa fish coming from Bangladesh unable to cross Farakka Barrage. Earlier this fish was found up to Allahabad.
    - Large number of studies indicates that Dams have led to loss of number of types of fishes, turtles and other aquatic animals that were present in the river previously. (International Union for Conservation of Nature; report on convention of Biological Diversity; report on effects of Hydropower projects on Terrestrial Biological Diversity).
    - So the impact of Dams on pollution is by limiting the fishes.

Second impact of the Dams, specifically on the Ganga, is through Coliphages. The river water contains beneficial bacteria called Coliphage and harmful bacteria called Coliform. Coliphages eat up the Coliform and clean the river.

- The Coliphages stick to the sediment in the river bed and remain dormant until they find Coliform around them. Then they become active and start eating the Coliform.

- Scientists of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) have told us in discussions that Coliphages in the Ganga are unique. Normally one type of Coliphage eats one type of Coliform. There are thousands of types of Coliphages and Coliforms present in any river water.
- The unique quality of the Coliphages of the Ganga is that one Coliphage eats a large number of the Coliform. Coliphages of the Ganga are like the wide spectrum antibiotics—one antibiotic medicine kills a large number of bacteria. This is the secret of the "self-purifying" quality of the Ganga. The water of the Ganga does not spoil because the Coliphages continue to eat the Coliforms.
- These wide spectrum Coliphages live in the sand of the Ganga and they are created in the upstream stretches. The sand flows down the Ganga and carries these Coliphages with it to the plains. This sand is arrested in the Tehri Dam and does not reach downstream of the Ganga. The Coliphages are arrested behind the Tehri Dam along with the sand and do not reach downstream.

Details

- the action plans should aim at improving the polluted stretches for at least bathing purposes
- There has to be meaningful further action to restore the minimum prescribed standards for all the rivers of the country
- The tribunal specified that Chief Secretaries of each State and administrators of UTs will be "personally accountable for failure to formulate action plan."
- The bench directed that four-member committees, comprising representatives of State pollution control boards and the State governments, be constituted for preparing and executing the action plans.

Action Plan

- Collect data about the quantification and characterization of sewage generated in the catchment area of the polluted river stretch
- Follow it by identification of polluting sources
- Look into the functionality of sewage treatment plants and common effluent treatment plants
- If not proper provide the solid waste management and processing facilities

Royle's Pika / Himalayan Mouse Hare

- Royle's pika (Ochotona roylei) is a species of mammal in the pika family (Ochotonidae).
- IUCN: Least Concern
- It is found in China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan.
- The most common pika in Himalayas with a HBT length of 17-22 centimeter. Royle's pika has slightly arched head with rufous-grey body with chestnut-colored head and sparse hair in front of its ears.

Concerns

- These animals survive almost entirely on specific plants that grow only in cold, wet conditions; plants that are not expected to tolerate the warmer weather that climate change would bring.
- Warmer weather can alter plant communities in high-altitude ecosystems like the Himalaya and also affect animals that depend on them.
- For instance, fossil records reveal that cold-loving pikas dwelt in parts of then-frigid Africa, too.
- However, warmer weather around 5-10 million years ago reduced the 'C3' plants (ancient plants that use more water during photosynthesis and can survive only in cold and wet climes) that the pikas ate, leading to the animals' extinction.

DNA 'metabarcoding'

- Researchers at Bengaluru's Indian Institute of Science and the University of Sheffield have deciphered the plants that these animals eat by collecting the pika faeces (pellets) from five locations in Uttarakhand including the Nandadevi Biosphere Reserve.
- In the laboratory, they used a method known as DNA 'metabarcoding', which helps identify the DNA of plant species in animal faeces.

Results

- The researchers found that the pellets contained 79 different genera of plants (earlier, visual observations of animals feeding had revealed only 26 species); 97% of these are C3 plants that cannot tolerate hot and dry weather.
- Pikas prefer forbs (flowering herbs) over grasses; more than 50% of plants they eat are endemic to the Himalayas.
- Currently, there is no dearth of C3 plants available for the pikas that are distributed widely between 2,400-5,000 metres in the Himalaya. However, pikas could be affected if climate change reduces the distribution of C3 plants that the mammals feed almost entirely on, write the authors.

Satkosia Tiger Reserve

- It is a tiger reserve located in the Angul district of Odisha
- The tiger reserve is located in the Eastern Highlands moist deciduous forests ecoregion.
- It is located where the Mahanadi River passes through a 22 km long gorge in the Eastern Ghats mountains.

Context

- Experts of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) the Royal Bengal tigress 'Sundari' will continue to stay in Satkosia Wildlife Sanctuary
- The local people are demanding that the tigress be shifted from Satkosia Wildlife sanctuary alleging that it killed a woman.

Snow Leopard

Context

- A snow leopard was spotted at a height of about 4,000 metres in Lippa-Asra wildlife sanctuary in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh

Details

- IUCN: Vulnerable
- The snow leopard inhabits alpine and subalpine zones

Bishkek Declaration

- It was an agreement signed by 12 countries that are home to this species namely Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- The declaration was initiated in order to formulate a long-term Global Snow Leopard Conservation Programme by the formation of a high-level steering committee to guide programme implementation and regularly review its progress.

- The key goals of the programme are to evaluate and map the current status of key snow leopard populations and habitats to set baselines and indicators against which to assess future change.

Soil degradation

Background

- As the rains abate in Kerala and parts of Kodagu district in Karnataka, the loss of lives and the devastation of infrastructure and crops is apparent. However, as rebuilding is planned, what is often ignored is the soil that has been washed away.
- While roads and houses will be rebuilt, and crop losses compensated partially through insurance, the gradual loss of soil productivity can have a lasting impact on the local economy.

Stats

- A 2014 review of soil degradation in India by multiple institutions shows that an estimated 14 million hectares suffer soil degradation due to flooding annually.
- The impact of floods on soil was also studied in detail following the 2009 floods in North Karnataka, which killed over 170 people and caused an estimated loss of over Rs. 16,500 crore.
- Researchers from the National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning (NBSS&LUP) and other institutes estimate that 13 flood-hit districts lost 287 million tonnes of top soil and soil nutrients across 10.75 million hectares of farmland.
- Under market prices, the replacement of nutrients such as nitrates, phosphates and iron would have cost Rs. 1,625 crore, while another Rs. 853 crore would have been spent on replenishing organic material lost.

Concerns

- Soil would take thousands of years to form through natural processes. All these efforts have been dumped in reservoirs or in the sea due to nature's fury.
- In the past, a soil profile of a few affected districts, done under the State's integrated watershed scheme, shows large swathes of these areas having "shallow or very shallow" soil depth, organic carbon deficiency, and low productivity of land.
- To recover and replace would take a "considerable" amount of time, and a steadfast programme of recovery

Floods good for soil

- Not all floods are bad for the soil, as seen in the oft-occurring floods along the banks of the Ganga, Kosi, Brahmaputra and other rivers taking birth in the Himalayas.
- There, the gushing river emanating from the mountains carries with it loosened alluvial soil, and not only washes over farmlands, but also replenishes flood plains with fertile soil.

Conclusion

- However, in south and central India, floods wash away rich, weathered soil, which are deposited in reservoirs or as sand bars along the river bed or in the sea.
- Any rehabilitation programme must consider this lost soil.

Shoot-at-sight order for 'man-eater' tiger: SC

Background

- The Supreme Court dismissed the plea filed by Earth Brigade Foundation (EBF) to overturn the order to shoot a five-year-old tigress from Pandharkawada in Maharashtra.
- This tigress, which is raising two cubs, has been accused of killing — and even eating — more than a dozen people over the last two years.
    - The tigress, known as T1, is believed to be responsible for the deaths of 13 people since January 2016.

Issues raised by EBF

- EBF's main contention is that all the kills have taken place within designated forest areas or on their periphery
- This forest is home to spillover tigers from the nearby Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary
    - Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary is located about 30 km away from Adilabad town in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra
- Human encroachment is rampant — it disrupts contiguity of the habitat and multiplies the chances of man-animal conflict.
- The forest has scant food for wild herbivores.
    - Alarmingly, there is heavy pressure of illegal grazing, with livestock consuming a huge proportion of the food and water meant for wildlife.
    - Locals take cattle and goats "on contract" from rich owners to graze them illegally in the forest.
- The Forest Department, mandated to preserve forests and their denizens, appears to be apathetic towards the basic tenets of habitat management.

Questions that need to be answered

- What is the objective of this SC move? Is it to make forests safe for humans, or for wildlife?
- Instead of unequivocally standing up for the forest and its denizens, why choose the path of least resistance by shooting dead a tigress, terming her a "man-eater"?
- Why not make a fair attempt to tranquilize and capture the tigress and move them to captivity?
- The Maharashtra Forest Department seems to prefer to invite a private hunter instead of calling upon personnel from within the government. Why?

Colonial Legacy

- The term "man-eater" is the legacy of the British Raj.
- However, it is now used whenever it is necessary to scare people, including those who rule on what is just, into demanding the killing of a tiger/leopard involved in a man-animal conflict.
- The solution is there needs to be a scientific study done with modern technology to label a tiger a 'man eater

Complications

- It's harder to tranquilize a tiger than to kill it. The range of a tranquilizing dart gun is only 25 meters
- It's the end of the monsoon season. That means T-1's area is now lush and green; actually, it's totally overgrown. The tigress will enter the thickets of lantana bushes and vanish.

Conclusion

- With the court upholding the shoot order still many strict requirements must be met before one of the endangered animals can legally be killed.

Stubble Burning

What Is Stubble Burning?

- Stubble burning is, the act of removing paddy crop residue from the field to sow wheat.
- It's usually required in areas that use the 'combine harvesting' method which leaves crop residue behind.

What is Combine Harvesting?

- Combines are machines that harvest, thresh i.e separate the grain, and also clean the separated grain, all at once.
- The problem, however, is that the machine doesn't cut close enough to the ground, leaving stubble behind that the farmer has no use for.
- There is pressure on the farmer to sow the next crop in time for it to achieve a full yield. The quickest and cheapest solution, therefore, is to clear the field by burning the stubble.

Why do Farmers Burn?

- Cost Factor: The straw management equipment is costly and process is time consuming. Also, the cost of stubble management is not taken into account while determining the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- Increasing mechanization of agriculture: Stubble problem was not as severe when paddy was harvested manually because the farmers use to cut it as close to the ground as possible. Due to mechanization the crop residue that remains in the field is of larger quantity;
    - Labour costs are very high now
    - Combine harvester machines to tide over the labour scarcity- The machine appears to be the key reason behind the problem because it only reaps the grains, leaving stalks or stubble of around 40 cm. Those who want fodder have to get the stubble removed manually or use specialized machines to do the job. But that is costly. For every 0.4 ha of wheat crop, the cost of renting a combine harvester is just Rs 800. Once the machine has harvested, the cost of getting the stubble removed is Rs 3,500/ha.
- Time Factor: Delay in sowing means yield decline, this leaves very little time to clear the farm for sowing.
- Monoculture of wheat and paddy. In Andhra, bean gram and black gram are planted while rice stubble decomposes on its own.
- Unlike wheat stalks that are used as animal fodder, the paddy straw has high silica content that animals can't digest.

Laws

- Crop residue burning is punishable under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
- National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned crop residue burning in states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.
- National Policy for Management of Crop Residue(NPMCR)
    - Under this policy each state needs to have an action plan to stop residue burning by involving people at different levels—from communities to panchayats to state governments.
    - It also calls for a mechanism to alert to cases of crop burning.

- The 2014 national policy envisages adoption of technical measures, including diversified uses of crop residue, capacity building and training.
- It also talks about extending central financial assistance for various interventions.
- The NPMCR emphasizes that the crop residues can be gainfully utilized for composting, power generation, biofuel production and mushroom cultivation besides several other uses like thatching, mat-making and toy making.

Other Countries

- Among the developed countries, the United Kingdom enacted the Crop Residues (Burning) Regulations Act in 1993 that prohibits people from burning residue, except for purpose of education or research or to eliminate pests.
- China, however, devised an interesting way to deal with the problem. It banned stubble burning in 1999 and penalizes officials under whose jurisdictional area the burning is detected. The fines go up to $80,000.
    - In 2015 in Henan county government collected $ 37 million in such penalties.

Examples

- Meerut farmers stopped burning crop residue, paddy waste and sugarcane leaves; instead, their farmers have started making organic manure from the remains.
- Haryana government issues directive to local officials to Report stubble burning cases within 30 minutes

Other Use for the Stubble

- Traditionally, crop residue had a lot of benefits like thatching, or making beds for livestock and cattle.
- One option is to produce biomass with the residue to generate power.
- The straw can similarly be used to make pellets that serve as the sub-strata for mushroom cultivation
- The real issue is who cuts and collects the crop residue, and then takes responsibility for transporting them? As of now, the farmer has no incentive to take the pains of extracting crop residue from the earth.

Measures that can be taken

- The most efficient technology to counter crop burning at the moment seems to be the Turbo Happy Seeder (THS).
    - The THS is basically a machine mounted on a tractor that not only cuts and uproots the stubble, but can also drill wheat seeds on the soil that has just been cleared up. The straw is simultaneously thrown over the sown seeds to form a mulch cover.
    - The THS can also be fitted with the Super-Straw Management System (S- SMS) that spreads the straw evenly. But this is expensive.
- So Govt should provide Subsidy to buy and use machines.
- If production of other crops, like maize, is made more lucrative, then farmers will switch to growing those.

Context

- Punjab Chief Minister had earlier directed the department to actively engage its machinery for on-ground activities at the village-level to effectively tackle the menace of stubble burning.
- The nodal officers would also be tasked with keeping a strict vigil over the post-harvesting operations.

- The nodal officers will undertake various activities, ranging from holding meetings with the farmers, arranging crop residue management (CRM) machines, distribution of pamphlets/leaflets etc in villages, besides making announcements in Gurdwaras or by other modes.
- These nodal officers have also been tasked to interact with village schools for organizing rallies and awareness lectures to sensitize students so that they could in turn prevail upon their parents to make them aware about the ill-effects of stubble burning.
- The concerned nodal officers would submit their detailed status reports through the coordinating officers to sub divisional magistrates (SDMs) at the end of the season, so that the entire data is collated and stored in the offices of the concerned Chief Agriculture Officer for record and reference purpose.

TX2 Programme

- It is an ambitious and visionary species conservation goal was set by the governments of the 13 tiger range countries: to double the number of wild tigers by 2022.
- WWF remains a major driving force behind Tx2.
- The focus is on "saving" tigers at a site or country level, Tx2 uses a strategic, long-term approach – working across entire landscapes and encouraging trans-boundary collaboration.
- This involves increasing protection where the tigers are currently, maintaining wildlife corridors and connectivity between areas and then boosting resources and protection for where tigers can be in the future, when their numbers have increased.

Context

- Nepal is set to become the first country in the world to double its tiger population.

WAYU (Wind Augmentation Purifying Unit)

Context

- Union Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan inaugurated air pollution control device WAYU(Wind Augmentation PurifYing Unit) for traffic junctions at ITO intersection and Mukarba Chowk in Delhi

Why was it required?

- Most high traffic density zones have lot of buildings in the neighbourhood leading to restricted flow of air or what is technically called "Street Canyon" effect/ urban canyon.
- Consequently, emissions coming from vehicle tail pipes do not get diluted and road dust remains suspended in the air.
- The modification of temperature and wind by the presence of a street canyon, consequently affect the air quality inside the street canyon.
- In urban environments, vehicle tail pipe emissions are the major source of many air pollutants such as ultrafine particles, fine particles, carbon dioxide, NOx.
- These pollution plumes created on the street make the surface level pollution concentrations much higher
- In order to address this issue WAYU was designed.

How does it work?

- The device, which brings together developments in chemistry, physics and micro-meteorology on a single platform.
- In the first stage, a fan sucks air around the device and pollutants like dust and particulate matter are separate using three filters of different dimensions.

- After this, the air is led into a specially designed chamber where carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons content in the air are oxidized into less harmful carbon dioxide using activated carbon coated with titanium dioxide.
- The oxidation is supported by two ultraviolet lamps. The purified air is then ejected with force into the atmosphere so as to help dilute pollutant content in the outside air.

Action on climate change could add $26 trillion to world economy

Context

- According to the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, a think tank grouping the economic benefits offered by a shift to a low-carbon economy have been "grossly" underestimated.
- The report finds that we are significantly under-estimating the benefits of cleaner, climate-smart growth. Bold climate action could deliver at least US$26 trillion in economic benefits through to 2030 urging nations and businesses to step up their engagement.

Global Commission on the Economy and Climate

- It is a major international initiative to examine how countries can achieve economic growth while dealing with the risks posed by climate change.
- The Commission comprises former heads of government and finance ministers and leaders in the fields of economics and business
- It was commissioned in 2013 by seven countries – Colombia, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Norway, South Korea, Sweden and the United Kingdom – as an independent initiative to report to the international community.
- *New Climate Economy (NCE)*
    - It is the Commission's flagship project.
    - It provides independent and authoritative evidence on the relationship between actions which can strengthen economic performance and those which reduce the risk of dangerous climate change.

Details

- The Report finds that over the last decade there has been tremendous technological and market progress driving the shift to a new climate economy.
- There are real benefits to be seen in terms of new jobs, economic savings, competitiveness and market opportunities, and improved wellbeing for people worldwide.
- Momentum is building behind this shift by a wide range of cities, governments, businesses, investors and others around the world
- The Report highlights opportunities in five key economic systems – energy, cities, food and land use, water, and industry. It demonstrates that ambitious action across these systems could deliver net economic gains compared with business-as-usual.

The Global Commission calls on governments, business, and finance leaders to urgently prioritise actions on four fronts over the next 2-3 years:

- Ramp up efforts on carbon pricing and move to mandatory disclosure of climate-related financial risks;
- Accelerate investment in sustainable infrastructure;
- Harness the power of the private sector and unleash innovation;
- Build a people-centred approach that shares the gains equitably and ensures that the transition is just.

59 plant species in IUCN threat categories

Context

- Scientists have recently identified the threat status of 59 Indian plant species based on criteria used by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Details

- Experts from several institutes prioritized 59 plant species that are at risk of "elimination" if the threat levels they face are not assessed soon
- They revealed that 10 species are critically endangered, 18 endangered, six vulnerable, five near threatened and one species each are data deficient and least concern.

Palm Bentinckia Nicobarica

- It is currently listed as endangered; however the new study suggests it is critically endangered based on its distributional attributes (the palm is reported only from the Great Nicobar Island).

Possible Causes

- Based on population sizes and numbers of mature individuals remaining in the wild using field surveys revealed that habitat loss was a huge factor affecting many declining plant population
- Factors such as low seed viability could have caused declines in the wild too.

Significance of this report

- This would streamline conservation efforts for the plants.
- Funding agencies often consider the threat status of species provided in IUCN's Red List (a catalogue of the world's threatened species), to sponsor research and conservation activities to save them

Environment Ministry report on e-waste

Context

- According to report by Environment ministry the many of India's electronic-waste (e-waste) recyclers aren't recycling waste at all, while some are storing it in hazardous conditions.

Details

- India generates more than two million tonnes of e-waste annually
    - India now has 178 registered e-waste recyclers, accredited by the State governments to process e-waste.
    - But bulk of it is processed in the informal sector.

Institutional Mechanism

- The CPCB and the State Pollution Control Boards are empowered to check whether recycling agencies are complying with the rules.

Laws for e-waste

- In 2017, the Centre brought into effect the E-waste Rules, which require companies that make or sell electronic equipment to collect a certain percentage of e-waste generated from their goods once they have reached their "end-of-life."

- But doing this would require these firms to work with licensed e-waste recyclers and ensure that all e-waste is properly disposed of.
- The checks led the Ministry to conclude in its report that "…a number of transgressions were seen committed by the recycling facilities such as
    - Adopting non-environmentally sound methods of storage, handling and processing of e-waste
    - Non-compliance with guidelines of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)
    - Certain recycling facilities were non-operational or seemed to be inadequate to handle the capacity of e-waste as these devices are expensive
- Though the laws are in place, these rules can be successful only if properly enforced. But that's not happening

8. HEALTH ISSUES

Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)

- Under the vision of Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Jan AarogyaYojana (AB-PMJAY) shall be implemented so that each and every citizen receives his due share of health care
- This is the "world's largest government funded healthcare program" targeting more than 50 crore beneficiaries.
- It is a paradigm shift from sectorial, segmented and fragmented approach of service delivery through various national and State schemes to a bigger, more comprehensive and better converged and need based service delivery of secondary and tertiary care.

Background

- 71st Round of National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) has found 85.9% of rural households and 82% of urban households have no access to healthcare insurance/assurance.
- More than 17% of Indian population spends at least 10% of household budgets for health services.
- Catastrophic healthcare related expenditure pushes families into debt, with more than 24% households in rural India and 18% population in urban area have met their healthcare expenses through some sort of borrowings.
- PMJAY primarily targets the poor, deprived rural families and identified occupational category of urban workers' families as per the latest Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data for both rural and urban areas as well as the active families under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY).

Pradhan Mantri Jan ArogyaYojana in alliance with the States:

- The Scheme is principle based rather than rule based, allowing States enough flexibility in terms of packages, procedures, scheme design, entitlements as well as other guidelines while ensuring that key benefits of portability and fraud detection are ensured at a national level.
- States have the option to use an existing Trust/Society or set up a new Trust/Society to implement the Scheme as State Health Agency and will be free to choose the modalities for implementation.
- States can implement the Scheme through an insurance company or directly through the Trust/Society/Implementation Support Agency or a mixed approach.

Pradhan MantriAarogyaMitra (PMAM)

- The scheme is creating a cadre of certified frontline health service professionals called Pradhan Mantri Aarogya Mitras (PMAMs) who will be primary point of facilitation for the beneficiaries to avail treatment at the hospital and thus, act as a support system to streamline health service delivery.
- AarogyaMitras training is being conducted in collaboration with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and Ministry of Skill Development to strengthen implementation and operational preparedness.

Benefits under the scheme:

- It will provide a cover of up to Rs. 5 lakhs per family per year, for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.

- Over 10.74 crore vulnerable entitled families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) will be eligible for these benefits.
- PMJAY will provide cashless and paperless access to services for the beneficiary at the point of service.
- PMJAY will help reduce catastrophic expenditure for hospitalizations, which impoverishes people and will help mitigate the financial risk arising out of catastrophic health episodes.
- Entitled families will be able to use the quality health services they need without facing financial hardships.
- When fully implemented, PMJAY will become the world's largest fully government-financed health protection scheme. It is a visionary step towards advancing the agenda of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Charter of Patients' Rights- Draft

Context

- Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released a draft copy of charter and it has been put up on the Health Ministry's website

Details

- The draft was prepared by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
- If it comes into force, patients will not just have the right to emergency medical care and informed consent, but will also have the right to non-discrimination, seek a second opinion and choose alternative treatment options, if available.
    - The patients will have the freedom to choose medicines or diagnostic tests from sources other than those recommended by their doctors or hospitals.
- The charter has also recommended that grievances should be addressed by
    - internal grievance redress units in clinical establishments,
    - then district-level authorities
    - Then state councils for clinical establishments.
- The document outlines patients' rights to information about their illness, proposed diagnostic tests, possible complications as well as likely additional costs due to changes in the course of the illness. Patients also have the right to emergency medical care irrespective of their paying capacity.
- The charter's rights are linked to existing legal provisions - such as the Consumer Protection Act, the Medical Council of India's code of ethics, the National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission's rulings and a Supreme court judgment on emergency care
- The Ministry plans to implement the Charter of Patients' Rights through State governments for provision of proper health care by clinical establishments.

Why was it done?

- Currently some States have adopted the national Clinical Establishments Act 2010 and certain others have enacted their own State-level legislations to regulate hospitals, there is no consolidated document on patients' rights that can be followed by all States uniformly
- So, the draft charter includes 17 rights with description, draws upon all relevant provisions, inspired by international charters and guided by national level provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document.

- This charter is expected to act as a guidance document for the Union Government and State Governments to formulate concrete mechanisms so that Patients' Rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law.

Concerns

- The controversial Karnataka Private Medical Establishments Act that had initially included various rights for patients was watered down subsequently.
- Right to non-discrimination is an important right. Every patient has the right to receive treatment without any discrimination based on his or her illnesses or conditions, including HIV status or other health condition, religion, caste, ethnicity or sexual orientation
- Now, the hospital management has a duty to ensure that no form of discriminatory behaviour or treatment takes place with any person under the hospital's care

Significance

- The NHRC expects the charter to serve as a "guidance document" for the Centre and states to formulate concrete mechanisms to protect the patients' rights and "operational mechanisms to make them enforceable by law".
- It will help one generate widespread public awareness and educate citizens regarding what they should expect from their governments and healthcare providers
- The charter also emphasizes on the need to uphold human dignity and privacy

Cyclone-30

Context

- The country's biggest cyclotron facility that will produce radioisotopes vital for diagnosis and treatment of cancer became operational

Details

- The machine – Cyclone-30 — is housed at the Kolkata-based Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)

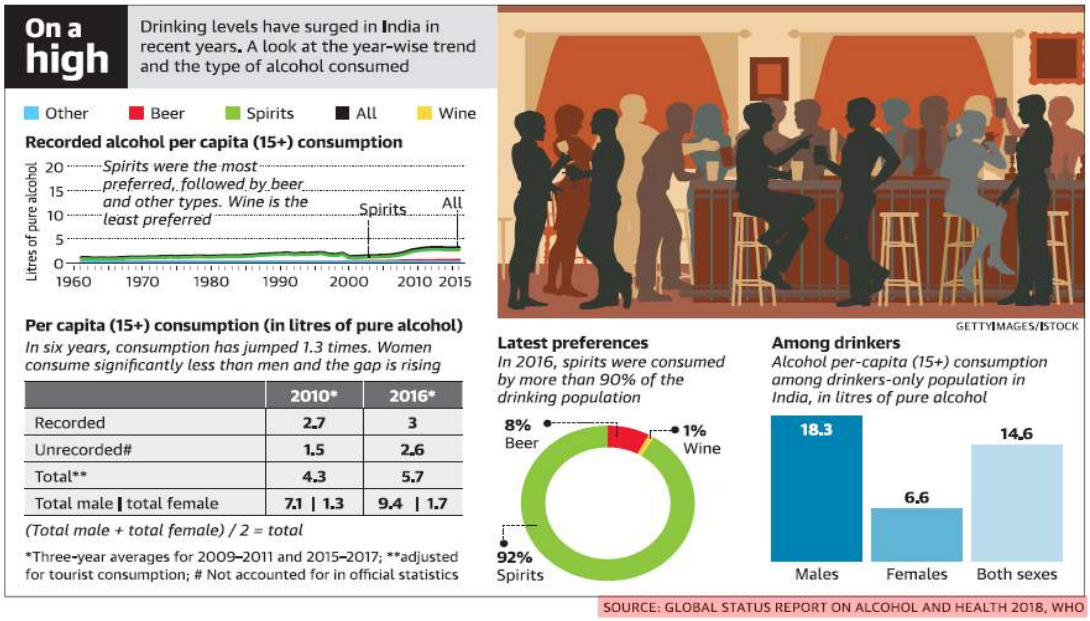
Function

- With increasing number of Indians diagnosed with cancer every year, the cyclotron machine will produce radioisotopes for nuclear imaging specifically for cancer detection
- The Kolkata facility will provide for affordable radio isotopes and related radiopharmaceuticals for the entire country, especially for eastern states like West Bengal, and also have export potential for germanium-68/gallium-68 generator for in-situ production of gallium-68 and palladium-103 isotopes, which are used for breast cancer diagnosis and prostate cancer treatment

Global Status Report on Alcohol- WHO

Context

- According to a report released by the World Health Organization (WHO) Per capita alcohol consumption in India has more than doubled from 2005 to 2016,



Across the world

- The consumption of alcohol has increased from 2.4 litres in 2005 to 5.7 litres in 2016 with 4.2 litres being consumed by men and 1.5 litre by women
- The total alcohol per capita consumption (15+ years) is expected to increase in half of the WHO regions by 2025
- The highest increase is expected in the South-East Asia Region.
- The second-highest increase is projected for the populations of the Western Pacific Region, where the population of China is the largest, with an increase in per capita consumption of 0.9 litres of pure alcohol by 2025.
- The increases in consumption although smaller, are also expected in Indonesia and Thailand (with the second- and fourth-largest largest populations).
- Total alcohol per capita consumption has increased globally after a relatively stable phase between 2000 and 2005. Since then, total per capita consumption rose from 5.5 litres in 2005 to 6.4 litres in 2010 and was still at the level of 6.4 litres in 2016

India

- An increase of 2.2 litres is expected in India alone which represents a large proportion of the total population in this region.

Harmful impact of alcohol

- The harmful use of alcohol is a causal factor in more than 200 diseases and injury conditions
- Liver diseases include alcoholic fatty liver, chronic liver disease and liver cirrhosis. Fatty liver is the most common result of excessive alcohol consumption.
- Mortality resulting from alcohol consumption is higher than that caused by diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and diabetes.
- It is one of the leading risk factors for populations worldwide and has a direct impact on many health-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those for maternal and child

health, infectious diseases (HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis), non-communicable diseases and mental health, injuries and poisonings.

- In 2016, the harmful use of alcohol resulted in some three million deaths (5.3% of all deaths) worldwide and 132.6 million Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs).
    - Among men in 2016, an estimated 2.3 million deaths and 106.5 million DALYs were attributable to the consumption of alcohol.
    - Among women 0.7 million died and they experienced 26.1 million DALYs attributable to alcohol consumption.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017

- Safeguarding the rights of people living with and affected by HIV, the Union Health Ministry has issued a notification to bring in force from Monday the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017.
- Provisions of the Act address HIV-related discrimination, strengthen existing programme by bringing in legal accountability, and establish formal mechanisms for inquiring into complaints and redressing grievances.

Some features of the Act

- The Ministry said the Act seeks to prevent and control the spread of HIV and AIDS, and prohibits discrimination against affected persons.
- The Act lists various grounds on which discrimination against HIV positive persons and those living with the condition is prohibited.
- These include the denial, termination, discontinuation or unfair treatment with regard to: employment, educational establishments, health care services, residing or renting property, standing for public or private office, and provision of insurance (unless based on actuarial studies). The requirement for HIV testing as a prerequisite for obtaining employment or accessing health care or education is also prohibited.
- Every HIV infected or affected person below the age of 18 years has the right to reside in a shared household and enjoy the facilities of the household. The Act also prohibits any individual from publishing information or advocating feelings of hatred against HIV positive persons and those living with them.
- Provisions of the Act state that a person between the age of 12 and 18 years who has sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his/her HIV or AIDS-affected family shall be competent to act as guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age to be applicable in matters relating to admission to educational establishments, operating bank accounts, managing property, and care and treatment, among others.
- Provisions of the Act state that every person in the care and custody of the State shall have the right to HIV prevention, testing, treatment and counselling services.

Issues which are not addressed in the present Act

- Implementation of the HIV/ AIDS [Prevention and Control] Act is certainly a positive and a much-awaited development. However, the provisions only protect infected individuals from prejudiced behaviour and attitudes.

- Communities that are vulnerable to infection, individuals who are yet to be tested and kin of those infected are still subjected to stigma and biased perspectives.
- The need is to adopt a holistic approach to successfully combat discrimination against the infected and the vulnerable, and create safe spaces for them.
- Till about 15 years ago, people living with HIV/AIDS faced several challenges once they tested positive, particularly from healthcare providers, hospitals or clinics.
- Even today, the LGBTQ community faces double stigma — for being a part of the community and for being HIV positive.
- This is the reason many of them became secretive about their condition, and lived in seclusion.
- The historic apex court decision will ensure protection of their rights, reduce taboos and increase visibility for their issues.
- It will also cover legal disputes of family succession and property, which this community generally faces.
- Services provided to this community, such as health, entitlements or legal protection will now be regulated, and protected from abuse and exploitation.
- The next important step will be public education as acceptance of this community in society is still a challenge.

IMA moots ethics code overhaul

Context

- The Indian Medical Association (IMA) Marking a bold departure from the existing code of ethics that covers the medical profession, the IMA — an umbrella voluntary body that counts more than 2.5 lakh, or about a third, of the country's doctors as its members — is in the process of redefining the code in order to ensure a much more contemporary outlook.

Indian Medical Association

- It is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the wellbeing of the community at large.
- It is a society registered under The Societies Act of India.
- It's Headquarters at Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 29 States and Union Territories. It has over 2,15,000 doctors as its members through more than 1650 active local branches spread all over the country.

Objectives:

- To promote and advance medical and allied sciences in all their different branches
- to promote the improvement of public health and medical education in India
- To maintain the honour and dignity and to uphold the interest of the medical profession and to promote co-operation amongst the members thereof

What was the need?

- The current code of medical ethics by the Medical Council of India dates back to 2002
- Much has changed in the medical field since then and many relevant topics do not find a mention in the present code. Therefore, it was necessary to brainstorm on this aspect

What it intends to do?

- IMA would be releasing a handbook on the redefined code of medical ethics to its members at the association's annual cultural festival
- The code would subsequently be submitted to all the relevant Central Ministries – health, medical education, law and justice and the MCI – for consideration
- The handbook would comprise 24 topics that either need to be reviewed or find no mention in the current code.

Changes that will be deliberated

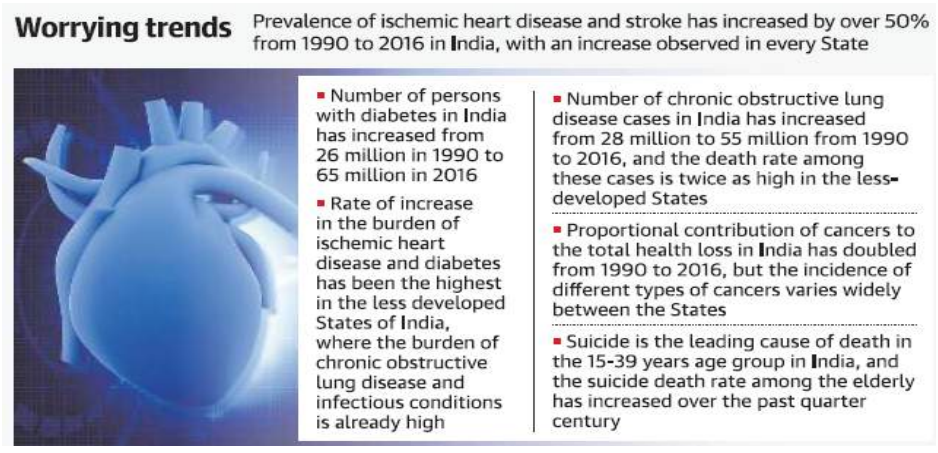
- The current MCI norms do not allow doctors to publicize their practice through any type of advertising but the new code will allow individual doctor advertise, have a website to promote practice to compete with aggressively marketed corporate hospitals
- Ethical issues around Assisted Reproductive Technology and surrogacy also find a mention in the handbook and the IMA states that doctors should ethically ensure that surrogates and egg donors are not exploited.
- The IMA also recommends that cadaver organ donations must be made compulsory for all unless an individual specifically states that he or she does not want to become an organ donor.
- Doctors cannot give consent for deciding on pulling the plug. This decision can only be taken by relatives

India State-level Disease Burden Initiative report

Context

- The India State-level Disease Burden Initiative report was released
- The report is a joint initiative of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, along with experts and stakeholders associated with over 100 Indian institutions.

Stats



Ranking

- The State-wise disease burden showed that Punjab has been ranked at the top for the burden of ischemic heart disease, followed by Tamil Nadu, and vice-versa for diabetes.

- West Bengal topped with the largest number of stroke cases followed by Odisha, according to the comprehensive analysis of several major non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
- Kerala was ranked at the top for the burden of cancer, followed by Assam.
- Being overweight was found to be a major risk factor for diabetes doubled in every State of India from 1990 to 2016.

Significance

- The insights provided by these findings are very timely for the planning of Ayushman Bharat, the National Health Protection Mission

National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) study on AIDS

Context

- According to figures released by National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) it said it would not be an easy battle to end the disease as there are still around 21.40 lakh people living with HIV in India, with the prevalence among adults stood at 0.22 per cent.

Why is this study important?

- The objective of HIV estimations is to provide updated information on the status of the HIV epidemic in India at the national and State/Union Territory level.
- Estimations of adult HIV prevalence, annual new infections (HIV incidence), AIDS-related mortality, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) needs are produced as outcomes of HIV estimations.
- The modelled estimates are needed because there is no direct reliable way of measuring these core indicators, which are used to track the epidemic monitor and evaluate response around the world

Stats

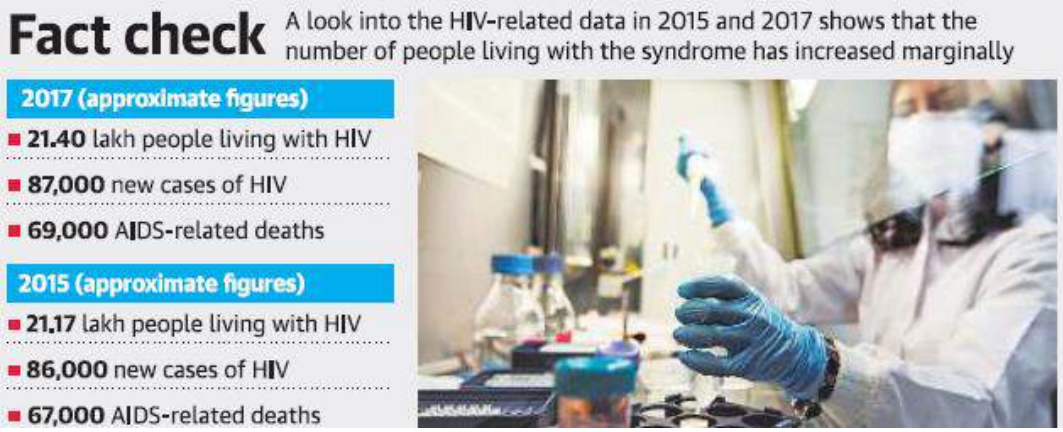
- There were around 87,000 new HIV infections and over 69,000 AIDS-related deaths (ARDs) in 2017.
- Around 22,675 mothers needed Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

What does the report say?

- This epidemic is high in some geographical regions and population groups
- The report has noted that the rate of decline in annual new HIV infections has been relatively slower in recent years
- The impact of the HIV/AIDS control programme has been significant, with more than an 80 per cent decline in estimated new infections from the epidemic's peak in 1995.

2015 Numbers

- India's 2017 figures also do not show a significant positive shift from 2015, the previous year for which when such a survey had been carried out
- In 2015, India had reported 86,000 new HIV infections.
    - Of these, children (<15 years) accounted for 12 per cent (10,400)
    - Remaining (75,000) were adults (15+ years).
- In 2015, the total number of people living with HIV in India was estimated at 21.17 lakh, while the same figure was 22.26 lakh in 2007.



Recommendations

- There should be no place for complacency as the country aims to achieve the ambitious goal of ending AIDS in India by 2030.

Rashtriya Poshan Maah (National Nutrition Month)

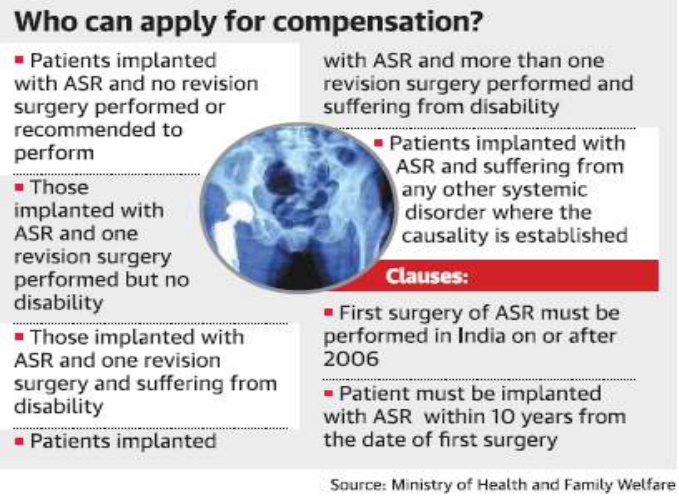
- It is being celebrated during the month of September across the Country as part of Jan Andolan under POSHAN Abhiyaan.
- The primary objective of the celebration of Poshan Maah is to take the messages of POSHAN to the grass root level.

POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission)

- It is India's flagship programme, launched in March 2018 to improve nutritional status of children up to 6 years, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers to achieve specific targets for reduction in low birth weight babies, stunting growth, under nutrition and prevalence of anemia over next three years
- POSHAN Abhiyaan is not a programme but a Jan Andolan, and Bhagidaari, meaning "People's Movement".
- This programme incorporates inclusive participation of public representatives of local bodies, government departments of the state, social organizations and the public and private sector at large.

State panels to track hip implant patients

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has said that State-level committees consisting of two orthopedic surgeons or physical medical rehabilitation experts and one radiologist from government hospital, a representative from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) and drug controller of respective States should be formed to identify patients who have received the faulty hip implant by pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson.



WHO says 34% Indians not active enough

Context

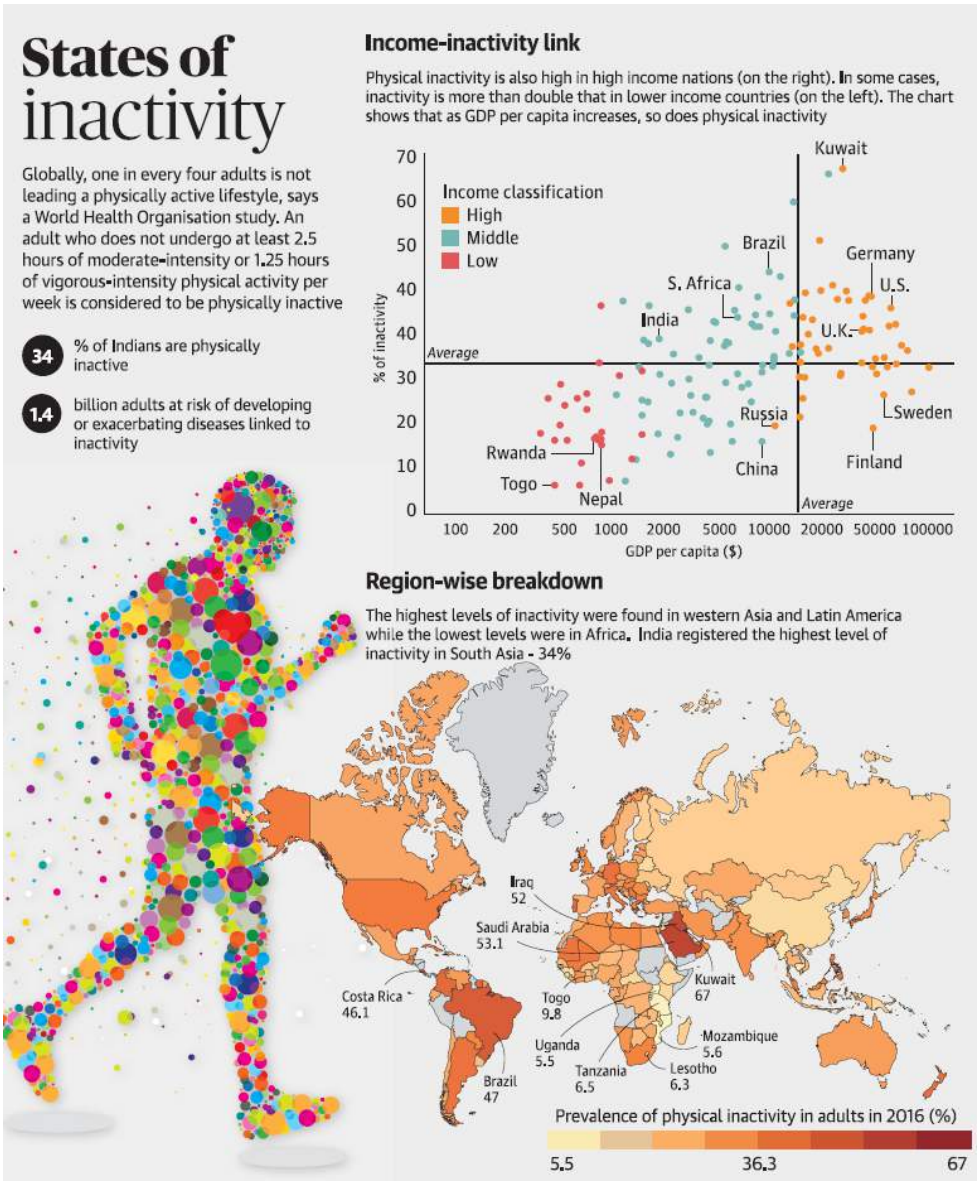
- Thirty-four per cent of Indians — 24.7% male and 43.9% females — are not active enough to stay healthy, according to the latest study released by the World Health Organization (WHO), which noted that, globally, more than 1.4 billion adults are at risk of diseases from not doing enough physical activity.

What did the study consider?

- The new study is based on self-reported activity levels, including activity at work and at home, for transport, and during leisure time, in adults aged 18 years and older, from 358 population-based surveys in 168 countries, and includes 1.9 million participants.

Details

- Published in Lancet Global Health, the study notes that there is no improvement in global levels of physical activity since 2001. The data shows that if current trends continue, the 2025 global activity target of a 10% relative reduction in insufficient physical activity will not be met.
- Insufficient activity puts people at greater risk of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, dementia, and some cancers
- Levels of insufficient physical activity are more than twice as high in high income countries compared with low income countries, and increased by 5% in high income countries between 2001 and 2016
    - The highest rates of insufficient activity in 2016 were found in adults in Kuwait, American Samoa, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, where more than half of all adults were insufficiently active.
    - Comparatively, around 40% of adults in the United States, 36% in the UK and 14% in China were insufficiently active.
- In 2016, around one in three women (32%) and one in four men (23%) worldwide were not reaching the recommended levels of physical activity to stay healthy — that is, at least 150 minutes of physical activity of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of physical activity of vigorous intensity per week.



SC questions 'leprosy-free' tag for India

Context

- Supreme court questioned the leprosy free tag and said the country was declared leprosy-free on December 31, 2005, the reality is "entirely different" in reference with reports of the National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) which said only 543 districts of the total 642 districts in the country had achieved the World Health Organization-required prevalence rate of less than one case of leprosy for 10,000 persons.

Details

- The underestimation of cases of leprosy and the declaration of elimination of leprosy has resulted in the integration of leprosy in general health services thereby leading to diversion of funds which would have otherwise been dedicated to eliminating leprosy,

Concerns Voiced

- Patients and their families continue to suffer from leprosy and its stigma.
- They are denied their fundamental right to food.
- They are not issued BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards to claim the benefit of various welfare schemes such as the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY).
- They are deprived of housing, basic civic amenities, adequate sanitary facilities and rehabilitation programmes.

Constitutional Principles Violated

- Majority of the populace afflicted with leprosy live as a marginalized section in society, deprived of even basic human rights. This manifestly results in violation of the fundamental right to equality under Article 14 and right to live with dignity under article 21

Recommendations

- Centre and states should take steps for eradicating discrimination against leprosy and rehabilitate those suffering from it.
- Provide the leprosy patients reservation under the disability quota and with Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards to enable them secure their right to food.
- Medical staff in private and government hospitals should be sensitised to ensure that leprosy patients do not face discrimination
- It must be ensured that drugs for leprosy are available free of cost and do not go out of stock at all Primary Health Centres and other public health centres.

Call for policy, action in diabetes prevention, management

Context:

- The Global Burden of Disease Study 2016 which was released recently points out that the prevalence of diabetes has increased more rapidly in the less-developed States of the country.
- The report contains alarming statistics for India. According to it the total number of people with diabetes grew from 26 million in 1990 to 65 million in 2016. The prevalence of diabetes in India was 5.5 % in 1990, but it has increased to 7.7 % in 2016.

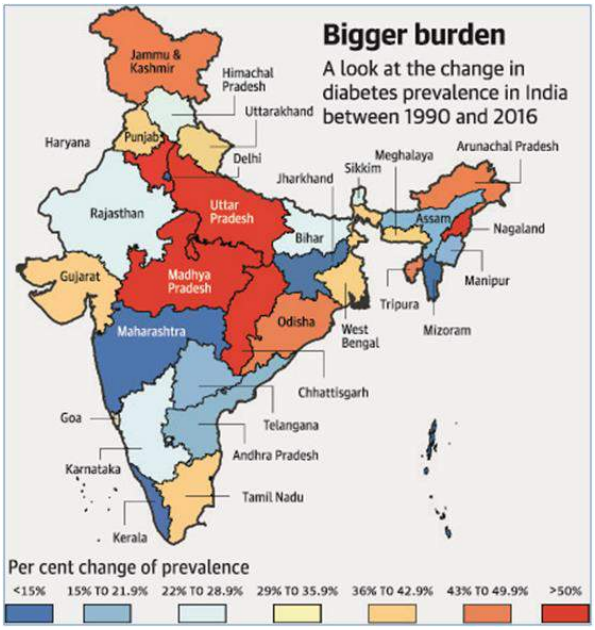
Key Points:

- The report says uncontrolled diabetes and its associated complications are likely to take a heavy toll in the coming decades on India's healthcare system.
- In order to ensure more effective prevention and management of diabetes, the report highlights the need for policy and health system action which is commensurate with the disease burden in each State.
- It calls for effective policy implementation by terming the increase in diabetes prevalence "a potentially-explosive public health situation",.
- When combined with appropriate allocation of financial and human resources, and a robust disease monitoring system, this would help in prevention, treatment and reduction of diabetes deaths and, in turn, curb the growing disease burden.
- The highest prevalence is seen in the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, followed by Delhi, Punjab, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura.

- The increase in loss of health from diabetes since 1990 is the highest among all major non communicable diseases.
- Diabetes contributed to 3% of all deaths in India, with an increase in death rates due to diabetes from 1990 to 2016.
- This highlights the low likelihood of meeting national and global targets for reducing deaths due to diabetes by 2025 and 2030, respectively.
- Among the risk factors contributing to diabetes in India in 2016, high BMI had the highest impact, while the other factors were dietary risks, tobacco use, occupational exposure to second hand smoke, low physical activity, and alcohol use.
- The prevalence of being overweight in persons aged 20 years or older had increased from 9% in 1990 to 20.4% in 2016.

Way Forward:

- Promoting a healthy and active lifestyle and interventions to prevent obesity, providing public facilities to increase physical activity, and taxing junk foods, would go a long way in reducing the numbers. The way forward would be creating awareness about diabetes.



First human case of rat virus found

- A man has developed the world's first ever human case of the rat version of the hepatitis E virus.
- There had previously been no evidence the disease could jump from rats to humans, to cause clinical infection.
- The disease was found in a 56-year-old man who persistently produced abnormal liver function tests following a liver transplant.
- He could have contracted the illness through food infected by rat droppings.
- Rat hepatitis E virus is very distantly related to human hepatitis E virus variants.
- It has major public health significance.

Hepatitis E

- Hepatitis E is a liver disease caused by infection with a virus known as hepatitis E virus (HEV).
- Every year, there are an estimated 20 million HEV infections worldwide, leading to an estimated 3.3 million symptomatic cases of hepatitis E.
- WHO estimates that hepatitis E caused approximately 44 000 deaths in 2015 (accounting for 3.3% of the mortality due to viral hepatitis).
- The virus is transmitted via the faecal-oral route, principally via contaminated water.
- Hepatitis E is found worldwide, but the prevalence is highest in East and South Asia.
- Two different patterns are observed, where hepatitis E is found in: resource-poor areas with frequent water contamination; and areas with safe drinking water supplies.
- A vaccine to prevent hepatitis E virus infection has been developed and is licensed in China, but is not yet available elsewhere.
- Prevention is the most effective approach against the disease. At the population level, transmission of HEV and hepatitis E disease can be reduced by:
- maintaining quality standards for public water supplies;
- Establishing proper disposal systems for human feces.

On an individual level, infection risk can be reduced by:

- maintaining hygienic practices such as hand-washing with safe water, particularly before handling food;
- avoiding consumption of water and/or ice of unknown purity; and
- Adhering to WHO safe food practices.

9. EDUCATION

Higher education in India

Introduction

- Higher education in India has grown exponentially in recent years.
- A survey by the All India Survey on Higher Education published shows that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) was 25.8% in 2017-18, up from 10% in 2004-05.
- GER is a statistical measure for determining the number of students enrolled in undergraduate, postgraduate and research level studies within the country and is expressed as a percentage of the population
- For higher education, the survey calculates the ratio for the age group 18 to 23 years. Internationally, the age group 18 to 22 is also used.

Comparison with other key countries

- India aims to attain a GER of 30% by 2020; it's still much behind countries like China, which, currently, boasts an enrolment ratio of 43.39%. USA's GER is 85.8%
- Though the GER for higher education in India is still less than what it is in developed countries, the growth rate is still quite impressive. The next step is to ensure that the outcome of academic programmes by higher education institutes (HEIs) is acceptable.

Radhakrishnan Commission Report (RCR)

- The RCR recommended a well-balanced education with 'general', 'liberal' and 'occupational' components.
- The report advocated that general education and specialized/professional education should proceed together.
- The study of languages should be given equal importance as one communicated to the outside world only through the medium of language. Therefore, a lack of communication skills could be a handicap.
- The report focused on laying stress on fundamentals of the subject so that individuals could think independently where they would be able to derive a firm conviction rather the focus on acquisition of special knowledge
- The RCR drew inspiration from the emphasis on general education in universities in the U.S.

The American parallel

- The National Academies Press (NAP) of the U.S. represents the national academies of sciences, engineering and medicine published the report
- The report attached significant importance to the integration of Sciences, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine and humanities in university teaching in both the RCR and NAP reports.
- It says the purpose of higher education is to prepare graduates for work and life, as well as active and engaged citizenship — achieved only through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies related to the profession they chose to specialize in and also written and oral communication skills, ability to work as a team, ethical decision making, critical thinking, and ability to apply knowledge in real world settings.

- The RCR, in turn, talked about including general education as an essential element. But the NAP report goes much beyond what the RCR states and advocates integrating the teaching of humanities in STEM.
    - Problems in a real-life setting are interdisciplinary and require an appreciation of related fields.
    - The NAP report acknowledges that disciplinary specialization has resulted in many developments but also points out that emerging problem are multi-disciplinary.

Current status in India

- The current scene in India in HEI is far from integrated.
- Several engineering, and science education and research institutes have embedded general education programmes at the undergraduate level. Such programmes are missing in most university-affiliated science colleges.
- There are institutions that cater to a single stream which prevent the possibility of even an informal interaction between students and faculty with different specializations.

Conclusion

- So, there are debates focused on Governance and Autonomy in higher education. The deliberations should also focus on content. The focus of undergraduate education should be on classical disciplines, with enough credits for general education. Focus on specialization can wait until the post graduate level.

World Summit on Accreditation (WOSA)

- It is a biennial Summit organized by National Board of Accreditation (NBA) ,which provides platform to stakeholders to share their knowledge and information on accreditation.
- The focus of WOSA 2018 is on "CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN OUTCOME BASED ACCREDITATION".
- NBA has already organized three Summits in 2012, 2014 and 2016 with the themes "Achieving Excellence through Accreditation", "International Recognition of Education Qualifications" and "Quality Assurance through Outcome Based Accreditation" respectively.
- The Summit will facilitate exchange of information on various challenges being faced during the transition between input-output based accreditation to outcome based accreditation. The discussion and global participation in WOSA 2018 will bring about new ideas and help in establishing new trends of identifying opportunities and challenges in professional and technical education world-wide.

Significance

- WOSA 2018 is an opportunity for academia and the industry to explore avenues for future partnerships and to create an environment for open dialogue to facilitate mobility of students and professionals world-wide to gain international experience.
- The participants will gain a greater understanding of prevailing global accreditation practices.
- The educational institutions will have an opportunity to interact with industry, policy makers and accreditation agencies from the globe and learn about their perspectives.
- It will also be a unique chance for the educational institutions to develop and fortify ties with the industry.
- Industry would be able to interact with educational institutions and accrediting agencies for exchanging views on their requirements of quality manpower and accreditation parameters.

Context

- Union Minister for HRD Inaugurates 4thWorld Summit on Accreditation(WOSA-2018)

52nd International Literacy Day

- 52ndInternational Literacy Day was organized at New Delhi where, Union Minister of Human Resource Development Shri Praksah Javadekar said that it is very sad to see a large number of illiterate people in the country even after 70 years of independence.
- To eradicate illiteracy from India literacy mission must be a social movement across the country. He further said that Government is committed to make New India and New India will be literate India (Saakshar Bharat).
- Recently launched 'Samagra Siksha' which is an integrated scheme for school education extending support to States from pre-school to senior secondary levels for the first time. Under this scheme about one million schools will get library grant of Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 20,000 to strengthen the libraries to ensure that "Padhega Bharat Badhega Bharat".

Background

- International Literacy Day (ILD) is celebrated on 8thSeptember every year all over the world.
- The celebration of ILD started following a recommendation of the World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy which met in Tehran in September 1965. The Conference recommended that 8thSeptember, the date of the inauguration of the Conference, be proclaimed International Literacy Day and be observed world-wide. UNESCO in 14th Session of its General Conference held in Paris in November 1966, formally proclaimed 8th September as International Literacy Day.
- In India, literacy and particularly Adult literacy has been a national priority since independence. With a view to eradicate illiteracy and impart functional literacy and lifelong education to adult education, National Literacy Mission was launched by Government of India in 1988.

10. ART AND CULTURE

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 Amendments

Context

- Historians have vociferously opposed changes to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958

Changes intended

- It proposes to allow the construction of Centre-approved public infrastructure within a 100 metre radius of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected monuments
- Insertion of a new definition of "public works" in section 2 of the Act.
- Amendment to section 20A of the Act so as to allow any Department or Office of the Central Government to carry out public works in the prohibited area after obtaining permission from the Central Government.
- Insertion of a new clause (ea) to section 20-I of the principal Act

Background

- The iconic monuments in India, images of the Taj Mahal, Ajanta Caves, The Great Stupa at Sanchi and the Sun Temple of Konark, among others are designated as "ancient monuments of national importance" and protected under the AMASR Act.
- The Archaeological Survey of India is the custodian of these monuments.

Massive urbanization and lack of laws for Protection

- There was a realization that protecting critically threatened monuments was becoming difficult.
- Encroachments and illegal construction close to these monuments were happening on a large-scale and the penal provisions in the AMASR Act for endangering ancient monuments were not stringent enough to provide effective deterrence
- As a result of the increased pressure of habitation, especially in urban areas, protected monuments and sites were getting hemmed in from all sides.
- This affected their safety, security and aesthetics. The AMASR Act was substantially amended in 2010 to strengthen several of its provisions.

Amendment in 2010

- The main features of the amendments were the creation of a "Prohibited Area" 100 metres around every national monument where no construction, public or private is permitted,
- "Regulated Area" 200 metres beyond the prohibited area, where any construction requires permission of a newly constituted National Monuments Authority.
- Given the unique nature of each monument, the Act also proposed heritage bye-laws for each monument to be prepared by an expert body.
- The UPA government's decision to designate a 100-metre prohibited perimeter around every monument was upheld by the Supreme Court of India.

Merits

- Prohibition of new construction within prohibited area is adversely impacting various public works and developmental projects of the Central Government.
- It will pave way for certain constructions limited strictly to public works and projects essential to public within the prohibited area and benefit the public at large.

Concerns

- It must be kept in mind that any construction, whether for a public project or private purpose, will pose risks to a monument.
- Allowing an exception for "public works" will open a Pandora's Box, and it will be all but impossible for the National Monuments Authority or the Archaeological Survey of India to ensure that such construction do not pose a threat to a monument.
- Public works are more often than not very large infrastructure projects. Allowing these in the immediate vicinity of a protected monument will defeat the very purpose of the AMASR Act and will be a violation of Article 49 of the Constitution.
    - It casts an obligation on the state to protect every monument or place of object of artistic or historic interest declared by or under law made by parliament to be of national importance

Bhaona

- It is a traditional form of entertainment, always with religious messages, prevalent is Assam
- It is a creation of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva, written in the early sixteenth century
- He created the form to convey religious messages to villagers through entertainment.
- The plays of bhaona are popularly known as Ankiya Nats and their staging is known as bhaona.
    - 'Ankiya' means one act and 'Nat' means drama. Therefore, 'Ankiya nat' simply means one act play.
    - These plays are comprised of an orchestra who are called 'Gaayan'(singers) and 'aaayans'(instrumentalists) and actors.
- The bhaonas are written in the Assamese and Brajavali languages

Brihadisvara Temple

- Rajarajesvaram or Peruvudaiyar Koyil, is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva located in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu
- It follows Dravidian architecture
- It is called as Dhakshina Meru (Meru of south).
- Built by Raja Raja Chola I between 1003 and 1010 AD, the temple is a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the "Great Living Chola Temples", along with the Chola dynasty era Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple that are about 70 kilometres
- Built out of granite, the vimana tower above the sanctum is one of the tallest in South India

Context

- Dagdusheth Halwai Ganpati Trust, the custodians of the Dagdusheth Ganpati Temple, has a 75yearold tradition of making replicas of historic temples across the country on the occasion of Ganesh Chathurthi, said Ashok Godse, president of the Trust.
- 2018, a 100 ft by 100 ft replica of the 11th century Brihadeeswara temple would be featured as part of the Trust's 126th year of public Ganesha festivities.

Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha

Context

- The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha in New Delhi

What was the objective?

- It was established in the year 1918 by our beloved Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi with the sole aim of propagating Hindi in southern states.
- "Hindi Prachar" was a movement that emerged as part of Freedom Movement and the leaders who led the nation to "FREE INDIA" felt the necessity of making a single Indian Language the National Language, and through that language unify the people and thereby intensify National Integration.

Details

- The Sabha was inaugurated by Annie Besant on June 17, 1918
- The first Hindi class was conducted by Devdas Gandhi, the youngest son of Mahatma Gandhi.
- During its silver jubilee celebrations, Gandhiji stayed for nearly 10 days on the premises of the Sabha.
- Parliament has made the Sabha as an Institution of National Importance in 1964.
- A centenary commemorative postal stamp to mark the 100th foundation day of the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha was released recently
    - The stamp contains a photo of Mahatma Gandhi, the founder president of the Sabha, and a letter written by him.
- It has played a very important role in strengthening the emotional unity of our country.

Gatka

- It is a traditional martial art associated with Sikhism
- The Punjabi name gatka properly refers to the wooden stick used.
- It is a traditional South Asian form of combat-training in which wooden sticks are used to simulate swords
- Gatka can be practiced either as a sport (khela) or ritual (rasmi). The sport form is played by two opponents wielding wooden staves called gatka. These sticks may be paired with a shield
- It is believed to have originated when sixth Sikh guru Hargobind adopted 'Kirpan' for self-defense during Mughal era and tenth Guru Gobind Singh made it compulsory for everyone to use the weapons for self defense

Other States

- Huyen langlon, Manipur
    - In the Meitei language, huyen means war while langlon or langlong can mean net, knowledge or art.
    - Huyen langlon consists of two main components: thang-ta (armed combat) and sarit sarak (unarmed fighting).
- Kalaripayatu, Kerala
- Khomlainai (Bodo wrestling), Asssam
- Mukna ,Manipur

- It is popular in Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur. The game is generally played on the last day of the Lai Haraoba festival and is an intrinsic part of the ceremonial functions.
- Silambam, Tamilnadu

Hindi Divas

- It is celebrated on 14 September because on this day in 1949, the Constituent Assembly of India had adopted Hindi written in Devanagari script as the official language of india

Hindi's Popularity in other countries

- Fiji: The island country in the South Pacific Ocean is the only other country, apart from India, where Hindi is designated as an official language.
  - The migration of the language to Fiji can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when it became a British colony and when the colonial authorities needed imported labour in order to sustain the sugarcane industry there.
  - Majority of those who formed the indentured labour force belonged to the linguistic region of northern India that is referred to as the Hindi belt, that today consists of states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan among others.
  - Today, about 37 per cent of Fiji's population consists of Indians, a large majority of whom are the descendants of indentured labourers.
- Mauritius: The island nation on the Indian Ocean passed on as a colony from the Dutch to the French to the British over the course of three centuries.
  - Indian presence in Mauritius can be traced back to the time when it was a Dutch colony and a large number of slaves and convicts were brought in from Bengal and South India.
  - The trend followed during the French colonial period as well.
  - With the British occupying the island in 1810 and the indentured labour system being established from the 1830s in order to meet the requirements of the sugarcane industry, Indian presence in Mauritius entered a whole new period.

Kamangari Bhint Chitro /Wall Paintings

- They were thriving art form in Kutch, in the palaces and homes of the affluent.
- Kamangari art originated in the 18th century.
- The themes were as diverse as the patron's tastes, but were predominantly mythological, with scenes from the Ramayana or Krishna Leela. Royal processions were another favourite. The landscape was another rich source of material, and date palms and peacocks and scenes from everyday life were common.
- The paintbrushes were made from the bark of the local date palm, and the colours sourced from tree bark, flowers and stones. The artists would paint on wet plaster to ensure permanence.

Kanthasth

- It is an initiative of Ministry of Home Affairs
- It is computer software for translating the all kinds of official files from English to Hindi and vice versa to make the translation work simpler and quicker.
- The Official language department has uploaded a dictionary of more than 15000 scientific and technical words on their website for technical usage.
- An app called Lila Mobile App is also in place for making the learning of Hindi language easier

- An E-learning platform called the "Pravah" also being developed by the department for use in 16 Indian languages including English.

Mehtab Bagh

- The Mehtab Bagh (Moonlight Garden) is a charbagh complex in Agra, North India. It lies north of the Taj Mahal complex and the Agra Fort on the opposite side of the Yamuna River, in the flood plains.
- The garden complex, square in shape, measures about 300 by 300 metres (980 ft × 980 ft) and is perfectly aligned with the Taj Mahal on the opposite bank. During the rainy season, the ground becomes partially flooded.
- The Mehtab Bagh garden was the last of eleven Mughal-built gardens along the Yamuna opposite the Taj Mahal and the Agra Fort, the first being Ram Bagh. It is mentioned that this garden was built by Emperor Babur. It is also noted that Emperor Shah Jahan had identified a site from the crescent-shaped, grass-covered floodplain across the Yamuna River as an ideal location for viewing the Taj Mahal.
- It was then created as "a moonlit pleasure garden called Mehtab Bagh." White plaster walkways, airy pavilions, pools and fountains were also created as part of the garden, with fruit trees and narcissus. The garden was designed as an integral part of the Taj Mahal complex in the riverfront terrace pattern. Its width was identical to that of the rest of the Taj Mahal.

Analysis:

- French traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier was the first to mention the story of a black Taj Mahal, and it caught the popular imagination in later centuries. However, archaeological excavations have found no evidence of any foundation on which such an edifice could have been built.
- Soon after the Taj Mahal was ready, Shah Jahan moved to the new city of Shahjahanabad in present-day Delhi, and possibly did not visit Agra for some years.
- However, Aurangzeb, who did visit Agra in 1652, said in a letter, that the dome of the mausoleum had developed a leak and needed repair. He got it repaired. He also said that though the octagonal pool and pavilions of the Mehtab Bagh were in good shape, the garden was inundated and had to be restored. This establishes the connection between the two parts separated by the river.

Mongmong

- It is a major festival of the Sangtams, the largest of the three principal tribes in Kiphire district bordering Myanmar.
    - The Sangtams are a Naga tribe living in the Tuensang and Kiphire districts of Nagaland.
    - They practice jhum, or shifting cultivation.
- The festival is observed in the first week of September every year.
- The predominant theme of the festival is the worship of the God of the house and the three cooking stones in the fireplace.
- Mongmong festival, which means togetherness forever is very cautiously observed every year and stretches over six days.
- The object is to have a good harvest, food grains for which the villagers toiled for the whole year.

Context

- Kiphire has been cut off due to landslides caused by incessant heavy rainfall.

- A tough monsoon made one of the most precious commodities – rice – scarce. Procuring rice had been an uphill task because a 300-metre stretch of the arterial road from Nagaland's commercial hub Dimapur to Kiphire district headquarters Kiphire had been damaged.

Muziris

- It was an ancient seaport and urban center on the Malabar Coast where traders from Greece, Egypt and Arabia would dock, currently in Kerala
- The name 'Muciripattanam' is mentioned in Sangam literature (which spans 300 BCE to 300 CE) as an affluent port and habitation on the western coast of 'Tamizhagam'.
- Muziris finds mention in the "Voyage around the Erythraen Sea", a work by a Greek speaking Egyptian merchant from the middle of the first century CE. It is described as one of the four active ports which exported pepper and other goods.
- Pliny the Elder, a Roman naturalist of the first century CE refers to Muziris, in his encyclopaedic work, 'Naturalis Historia', as 'the first emporium' of India. 'Emporium' in ancient times was a place reserved for the business interests of foreign traders.
- Its exact location is a subject of debate — more on that later — but the port's mouth was submerged in the mid-14th century by the flooding of the river Periyar, and Muziris subsequently declined in importance

Muziris Heritage Project

- It is a tourism venture by Tourism Department of Kerala to reinstate the historical and cultural significance of Muziris.
- Under the project, the state government will be developing a number of Islands which were created as a result of spice trade and ancient ports in the state.
- The project includes development works of Chennamangalam palaces, Cheraman Parambu, Synagogue and waterfront at North Paravur. It also envisages conservation of archaeological monuments within 125 sq km spread across Thrissur and Ernakulam districts.
- The nearby site of Kottapuram, a 16th-century fort, was also excavated (from May 2010) as part of the Muziris Heritage Project

Significance

- The Muziris Heritage Project would open up to Indian and foreign tourists a new destination,
- It would bring economic benefits to the people of the region

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Dargah in Ajmer

Context

- The historical dargah of Sufi mystic Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer is all set to get a facelift as a memorandum of understanding has been signed by the Dargah Committee, the Ajmer Municipal Corporation and Hindustan Zinc for spending ₹5.68 crore to clean and manage the shrine.

Details

- The 13th-century dargah has been included among the Swachh Iconic Places, a clean-up initiative focused on iconic heritage, spiritual and cultural places through a multi-stakeholder approach model.
- The campaign was initiated under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in 2016.

- In Ajmer, the Collector will act as the project's nodal agency with the Dargah Committee and 'khadims' (workers) being the primary stakeholders.
- An amount of ₹5.68 crore will be invested in the project's first phase for establishment of two flower compost making machines, cleaning and basic repair of the Jhalra pond, re-flooring in select areas, procurement of machines for cleaning the floors, risk management system plan, conservation of Shahjahani Gate and initial plans for Nizam Gate.

Moinuddin Chishti

- He was a Persian Muslim preacher, ascetic, religious scholar, philosopher, and mystic from Sistan, who eventually ended up settling in the Indian subcontinent in the early 13th-century, where he promulgated the famous Chishtiyya order of Sunni mysticism
- He arrived in Delhi during the reign of the sultan Iltutmish
- He was also known as Gharīb Nawāz (Benefactor of the Poor)
- His legacy rests primarily on his having been one of the most outstanding figures in the annals of Islamic mysticism
- He was one of the first major Islamic mystics to formally allow his followers to incorporate the "use of music" in their devotions, liturgies, and hymns to God, which he did in order to make the foreign Arab faith more relatable to the indigenous peoples who had recently entered the religion or whom he sought to convert

Sri Jagannatha Swamy temple

- The Sri Jagannatha Swamy temple, believed to be constructed in the 13th century is located in Andhra Pradesh.
- The temple, considered to be a replica of the famous Jagannath temple of Puri, Odisha, was constructed in accordance with the rules of the Pancha Ratra Agama Sastras.
- Prayers are offered to Lord Jagannatha Swamy, along with his siblings Subhadra and Balabhadra.
- Special pujas are performed to Sri Venugopala Swamy and goddess Mahalakshmi on the same premises.

Vaishnava Jana To

- It is one of the most popular Hindu bhajans, written in the 15th century by the poet Narsinh Mehta in the Gujarati language.
- The bhajan was included in Mahatma Gandhi's daily prayer.
- The bhajan speak about the life, ideals and mentality of a Vaishnava Jana

Extracts

- Call those people Vaishnavas who feel the pain of others, Help those who are in misery, But never let self-conceit enter their mind.
- They respect the entire world, do not ridicule anyone, and Keep their words, actions and thoughts pure
- They see all equally, renounce craving, Respect other women as their own mother, their tongue never utters false words, their hands never touch the wealth of others.
- They have forsaken greed and deceit, they stay afar from lust and anger

Context

- As part of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on October 2, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry is working on a new version of Vaishnava Jana To, the favourite bhajan of the father of nation.
- Multiple singers will sing the bhajan at the Taj Mahal and other iconic spots.

Details

- A film festival screening 15 archival films of the Mahatma will be held.
- For children, the I&B Ministry is exploring making an animation film on the Mahatma's teachings.
- A competition of short films has been planned. The Ministry is planning to get Mahatma's works translated into Sanskrit.

11. GOVERNANCE

All India Pension Adalat

- It was organized by the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions
- It will help in on-the-spot redressal of pensioners' grievances.
- This has given the right of "Ease of Living" to the pensioners
- It is convened with the objective of bringing on a common table the aggrieved pensioner, the concerned department, the bank or CGHS representative, wherever relevant, so that such cases can be settled across the table within the framework of extant rules.

Pre-Retirement Counselling (PRC)

- It was conducted for the Central Government employees who are about to retire in the next six months.
- The objective of the PRC Workshop is to create awareness about post-retirement entitlements as well as to educate them on advance planning for retirement including medical facilities and participation in voluntary activities after retirement.

Audits to track construction workers' benefits

Context:

Social audit pilot projects to check if construction worker welfare boards are registering workers and giving them benefits and also to weed out non-workers registered illegally in Rajasthan and Delhi.

Details:

- The construction industry is India's second largest employer, with estimates suggesting that there are between five and seven crore workers in the sector, of whom less than half are registered.
- In addition to the Social audit pilot projects, the Labour Ministry has also issued the draft framework for the social audit on implementation of the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996 (BOCW), in accordance with the Supreme Court's orders.
- The BOCW social audits aim to cover all districts every two years, with civil society organizations leading the process.
- The project is being coordinated by National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour (NCC-CL) in Delhi.

Background:

- The Supreme Court of India had delivered its Judgement in National Campaign Committee for Central Legislation on Construction Labour (NCC-CL) v. Union of India and Ors.
- The Judgement came 12 years after the original Writ Petition had been filed.
- The petition demanded the implementation of the Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation and Employment) Act, 1996 (BOCW Act), as well as the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Cess Act, 1996.
- These two Acts were designed to levy a cess on construction projects for the benefit of the workers.

- The proceeds of the cess would be held by a Welfare Board constituted in each state or Union Territory.
- The Welfare Board would have to disburse 95% of the funds for the benefit of the construction workers, the remainder to be utilized for their own administrative expenses.
- The Supreme Court also issued general directions to the concerned parties for implementing the Acts, such as constituting and appointing the authorities created under the statutes.
- The Court also directed the Ministry of Labour and Employment to actively consider extending the benefits of existing social labour legislation to the construction workers.
- Further, it directed the Ministry to consider whether construction projects of the government should also be brought under the Act.

What will the Social Audit team do?

- The teams visit construction sites as well as the areas where workers live, to check how many of them are registered with the welfare boards.
- They check if the children of the workers have the scholarships they are entitled to, how long the people have to wait for availing benefits like pension, maternity benefit etc.
- The social audit team will also find workers who have not registered and try to find the reasons that prevented them from doing so.
- The team would also check for illegal registrations.

Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics (CEDA)

- National Informatics Centre (NIC), in a joint initiative with National Informatics Centre Services Incorporated (NICSI) has set up CEDA.
- It will aid in fast-tracking the adoption of advanced analytics in government.
- It has been created to support government departments to unlock the hidden potential of the data that they are generating as a part of the governance processes, and use it to improve the overall governance. It will provide world class data analytics services to the Government.
- CEDA proposes to establish strong partnerships with academia and industry to ensure that the cutting edge technologies and quality expertise are brought in to help the Government take advantage of the booming analytic wave.

It aims at providing following services to Government:

- Data Quality Assurance Services –. The centre will provide data profiling tools and techniques and necessary expertise to analyze the data for quality issues.
- CEDA will implement knowledge repository to collect learnings from across projects and share best practices across initiatives and will ensure usage of best practices in across the government.
- CEDA will help ministries in assessing impact from the analytics solutions and help in understanding changes to organizational roles and responsibilities

NIC

- It is a premier technology advisor and ICT solution provider to Government at all levels, has always taken the first step to introduce the latest technologies and services in government, be it the introduction of ICT in Government, establishment of NICNET or National Knowledge Network (NKN), development of critical e-Governance solutions and a host of other services required by the Government.

- NICSI is a trusted partner of NIC and has been instrumental in supporting all NIC's initiatives through provisioning of resources and establishing & managing ICT infrastructure such as National Data Center at Shastri Park, Development Center, Cloud infrastructure etc.

Digi VAARTA

(Vehicle to Accelerate Access and Reach to Transformational Action)

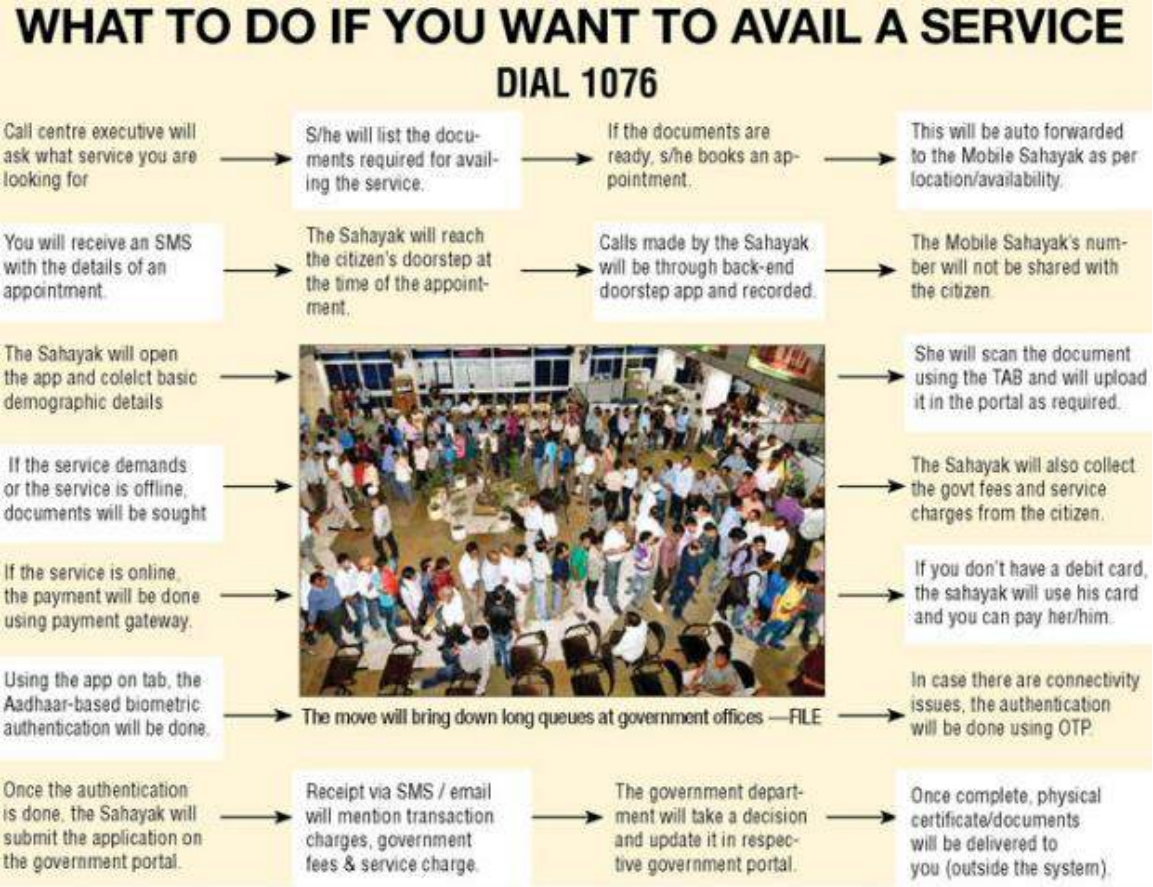
- It is a platform designed to enable Financial and Social Inclusion by educating citizens on various schemes and programmes.
- It will help and promote learning and behavioural change and empower users to draw content available under the financial and social inclusion programme as per their choice.
- DIGI VAARTA will enable adaptive and interactive communication with a high degree of personalization.
- Digi VAARTA communications with the general public are available in two channels and two languages (Hindi and English). Those who do not have smartphone can send toll-free SMS to toll-free number 14444.

Doorstep Delivery of public services by AAP in Delhi

Context

- The Delhi government launched its ambitious project to deliver public services at the doorstep of residents.

Details



- Delhiites can now apply for 40 government documents to be delivered at their homes for a fee of ₹50 per service.
- The applicant would have to call 1076 and fix an appointment with a mobile sahayak, who will go to their home and help with filling forms, payment of fees and collection of documents.
    - They will be informed of the documents they need, and can give a time when a "Mobile Sahayak" can come and collect them.
    - They will be equipped with necessary machines such as biometric devices and a camera.
    - The mobile sahayak would then submit the documents at the government office concerned, which would post the certificate or licence once issued.
- The government has enlisted a private company, VFS Global, to facilitate the services.

Why was it done?

- Availing public services is a time and energy consuming process.
- Long queues, poor infrastructure, inadequate officials in public departments and multiple visits to government office add to the public's woes.

Challenges

- The Delhi Chief Minister also appealed to the media to highlight problems in the implementation of the scheme to enable his government to resolve them in the next 10-15 days.
- People can also file their complaints and feedback on the same number if facing any issue in the delivery of service.

ISRO spy scandal case- Nambi Narayanan

Introduction

- He was an Indian scientist working with ISRO. He was in-charge of the cryogenics division
- In 1994, he was falsely charged with espionage and arrested.

Background

- In 1994, the Kerala police had arrested Mariam Rasheeda – a Maldivian woman for overstaying in India after the expiry of her visa.
- It turned into a sex-spy scandal allegedly involving three senior ISRO scientists, some businessmen and others.
- They were accused of passing on ISRO's cryogenic programme secrets to the women who in turn supplied it to Russia and Pakistan's ISI.
- Three scientists were arrested on the grave charge of sharing official secrets related to space technology and launch missions with foreign agents.
- In 1996, CBI probe cleared all the accused. It was concluded that the entire scandal was fabricated by the Kerala police officers who had investigated the case. All the accused were discharged thereafter.
- The CBI also had sent a confidential report indicting the state police officials.
- In 1998, the Supreme Court also upheld the CBI report stating that the scandal was fabricated.

How did the Kerala government respond?

- The attitude of the Kerala government has been obstinately ungracious.
- It opposed the CBI's closure report and made an attempt to revive the investigation by its own police.
- It has been unsympathetic to the demand for action against its errant police officers, arguing petulantly that there is no court direction to take disciplinary action against them.

Fight for restoration of honor and dignity

- The 'ISRO espionage case' marked a disgraceful chapter in the history of police investigation in the country.
- Ever since the proceedings were dropped, one of those arrested, S. Nambi Narayanan, has been battling for the restoration of his honour and dignity.
- The latest Supreme Court order has directed the forming a committee headed by a retired Supreme Court judge Justice DK Jain to consider ways to take action against the officers, addresses this glaring inadequacy in the process of restorative justice for those maliciously arrested. The prosecution of these officers is long overdue.
- The court has reaffirmed the principle that compensation is a remedy for the violation of human rights. But the so-called espionage case remains a study in the crude and archaic methods used by the police.

Way forward:

- For a country where it is not uncommon for those arrested for heinous offences to be exonerated after long years in prison, it is possible to argue that the compensation principle may open the floodgates for innumerable claims. The only way to avoid such a situation is to have a proper oversight mechanism to ensure that all investigation into crimes and complaints remains lawful.
- While granting ₹50 lakh to Mr. Narayanan, the court has taken note of his wrongful imprisonment, malicious prosecution and humiliation.

- While his honour and dignity were restored long back, the delay in a consequential inquiry into the conduct of the police officers concerned is disconcerting.
- Justice is not only about relief and recompense, and should extend to action against those at fault too. Much of the blame must fall on the Kerala government, which did not muster the courage to proceed against its police personnel.

Mahatma Gandhi International Sanitation Convention

Context

- Union Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation organized a global sanitation convention to mark the beginning of the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi, also coinciding with the fourth anniversary of the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission.

Details

- It will bring together Sanitation Minsters and other leaders in WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) from around the world.
- The global Convention will be aimed at sharing sanitation success stories and lessons across all participating countries.
- The success of the Swachh Bharat Mission will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the global achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 6.2), i.e. to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all.

Important themes that countries may choose to adopt while meeting the problem of insufficient sanitation

- ensure people lead the planning;
- implementation and management of sanitation programmes;
- use smart and affordable technologies for effective and efficient service delivery;
- eliminate all forms of inequalities in service delivery;
- create innovative financing instruments to fund and sustain the sanitation movement; and
- Develop capacities within the government to plan, implement and monitor sanitation programmes.

Some Stats on sanitation

- The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan-Grameen claims to have increased the percentage of the rural population with access to toilets from 39% in 2014 to almost 95%.
- Overall, 503 districts and 24 States have been declared open defecation-free. About $20 billion have been allocated to the programme

Gujarat government declaration of open defecation-free status questioned by CAG

- The CAG report stated a survey conducted in 120 gram panchayats in eight districts found that nearly 30 per cent of the households had no access to toilets, either individual or public.
- Out of the 54,008 households in the test-checked villages, only 38,280 (71 per cent) households have access to toilets, while 15,728 households or 29.12 per cent were without any access to toilets, the report stated
- The Union government had informed Lok Sabha that 11 states, including Gujarat, have been declared as ODF under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM).

National Digital Communications Policy-2018

Context

- The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the National Digital Communications Policy-2018 (NDCP-2018) and re-designation of the Telecom Commission as the "Digital Communications Commission".
- The new National Digital Communications Policy - 2018 has been formulated, in place of the existing National Telecom Policy-2012, to cater to the modern needs of the digital communications sector of India.

The key objectives of the policy are:

- Broadband for all;
- Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector;
- Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India's GDP from ~ 6% in 2017;
- Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017;
- Enhancing India's contribution to Global Value Chains; and
- Ensuring Digital Sovereignty.

Features:

The policy aims to

- Provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen;
- Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022;
- Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas;
- Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector;
- Train one million manpower for building New Age Skill;
- Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices;
- Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals
- Facilitate India's effective participation in the global digital economy;
- Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe and
- Secure digital communications infrastructure and services.

Strategy

- Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority;
- Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects;
- Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for Common Rights of Way, standardization of costs and timelines;
- Removal of barriers to approvals; and
- Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks.

Impact

- The NDCP-2018 envisions supporting India's transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by fulfilling the information and communications needs of citizens and enterprises by establishment of a ubiquitous, resilient and affordable digital communications infrastructure and services.

- The 'Customer focused' and 'application driven' NDCP-2018 shall lead to new ideas and innovations, after the launch of advanced technology such as 5G, IOT, M2M, etc. which shall govern the telecom sector of India.

National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA)

Context

- Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal inaugurated Two-day National Orientation workshop on National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA)
- e-Vidhan will make the functioning of the State Legislatures paperless and integrate all 40 Legislative Houses on to 'One Nation One Application'

Details

- It was organised by Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.
- The Orientation Workshop would include technical sessions and group discussions, which would facilitate exposure for the delegates about the positive attributes of NeVA; deliberations on issues faced by different State Legislatures in implementation of e-Vidhan and finding solutions thereof.
- The focus of the workshop would be to encourage all State Legislatures to move towards e-Vidhan platform and bring in transparency, accountability and responsiveness in their conduct of business, through the use of technology.
- NeVA is a Rs.739 Crore (approx.) project for bringing Legislatures on digital platform, covering all Houses. It is to be used by the Legislatures as well as all the Government Departments

mNeVA(NeVA-mobile app)

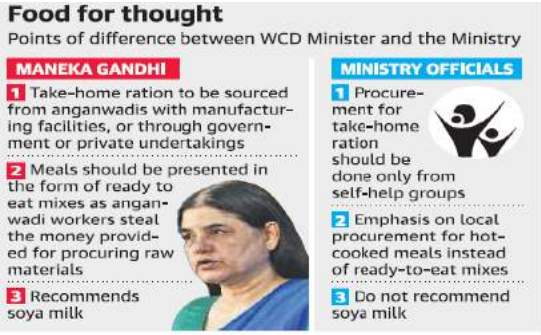
- It is a device neutral and user friendly app that has made information on conduct of business in Legislatures accessible anytime, anywhere to everyone.
- It is a work-flow based app deployed in Cloud (Meghraj) which helps the Chair of the House to conduct the proceedings of the House smoothly and the members to carry out their duties in the House efficiently.
- NeVA-mobile App is available for download from Play store and App store for Android and iOS mobiles respectively.

Nutrition guidelines approved by Niti Aayog

Context

- The NITI Aayog has approved the supplementary nutrition guidelines, prepared by the Ministry for Women and Child Development**,** bypassing Minister for Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi following intervention by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO)
- The PMO had stepped in to end a more than yearlong stand-off between Ms. Gandhi and the Ministry's officials in the wake of sharp differences over the proposed norms.

Differences



Concerns

- The debate continues to haunt the government about the mode of implementation.
- The Govt currently lacks the data about the quality of food with the different kinds of models that exist
- There is no data systems about the quality of food, how people use it, and what people think about it

Conclusion

- Lot of assumptions are being made within all quarters, but what we need to do is to look at what is actually happening on the ground.

Evidence Based Policy Making (EBPM)

- Evidence-informed policymaking is an approach that aims to integrate the best available scientific evidence into the design of public policies.
- So the objective is to ensure that a policy innovation from any state, regardless of the party in power, gets due attention and becomes a template for other states as long as it is backed by rigorous scientific evidence

There are many methodologies for evidence-based policy but they all share the following characteristics:

- Tests a theory as to why the policy will be effective and what the impacts of the policy will be if it is successful
- Includes a counterfactual: what would have occurred if the policy had not been implemented
- Incorporates some measurement of the impact
- Examines both direct and indirect effects that occur because of the policy
- Separates the uncertainties and controls for other influences outside of the policy that may have an effect on the outcome
- Should be able to be tested and replicated by a third party

Challenges:

- Accessing high-quality researchers in multiple disciplines who can partner with policymakers,
- Creating a willingness among policymakers to learn from evidence instead of relying solely on intuitions or ideologies.
- Policy processes are complex and rarely linear or logical and simply presenting information to policy-makers and expecting them to act upon it is very unlikely to work. Policy processes are not purely linear as they have various stages that each take varying lengths of time to complete and may in fact be conducted simultaneously. Strategies must be fluid.

Indian Example

- The government of Tamil Nadu entered into a partnership with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) to institutionalize the use of evidence in policymaking by rigorously evaluating innovative programmes before they are scaled up, strengthening monitoring systems and enhancing the officials' capacity to generate and use data.

International Example

- In 2010, UK Prime Minister David Cameron set up a Behavioural Insights Team, also called the "nudge unit", which later spurred a network of "What Works Centres**",** established to improve the way government creates, shares and uses high-quality evidence for decision-making.

Right to be forgotten

Context

- Justice BN Srikrishna Committee's draft Personal Data Protection Bill 2018 is introducing a new right — the right to be forgotten, to remove very old, irrelevant and unnecessary information links from social media networks.

What does the bill say?

- As per the Srikrishna Committee's Bill, an adjudicating officer, who is not a judge but a bureaucrat, will decide.
- According to Section 27 of the Bill a data principal (any person or individuals of that data) has a right to prevent the data processor or data fiduciary (could be a TV, web portal or newspaper) from using such data or information if data disclosure is no longer necessary, the consent to use data has been withdrawn or if data is being used contrary to the provisions of the law.
- Section 27(2) says the adjudicating officer can decide on the question of disclosure, and the circumstances in which he thinks such disclosure can override the freedom of speech and the citizen's right to information. In determining this, the adjudicating officer has to consider five factors listed in subsection (3). They are:
    - the sensitivity of the personal data;
    - the scale of disclosure and the degree of accessibility sought to be restricted or prevented;
    - the role of the data principal in public life;
    - the relevance of the personal data to the public;
    - The nature of the disclosure and of the activities of the data fiduciary, particularly whether the data fiduciary systematically facilitates access to personal data and whether the activities would be significantly impeded if disclosures of the relevant nature were to be restricted or prevented.

Exceptions

- The PDP Bill says the rights of the data principal, including the right to be forgotten, are exempted if the purpose of data processing is in the interest of the security of state (Section 42).
    - But, the Bill says, Parliament should pass a law explaining the procedures to determine the interests and to create another authority to decide the disclosure.
- Further, these rights will not apply to the processing of data in the interests of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of any offence or any other contravention of law (Section 43).
    - For that, too, however, Parliament has to make a law to consider and achieve such interests.

Appellate

- Aggrieved by the order of the adjudicating officer, one can file for a review.
- If he reaffirms the decision, an appeal can be made to the appellate tribunal.

Concerns

- But when the data principal is a public servant (for instance, a former minister or a Bureaucrat), and the data fiduciary is a newspaper or web journal, the freedom to criticize the public personalities for their public policies based on their past statements and activities will be in jeopardy, and a journalist has to wait for the decision of the adjudicating officer to clear her writing about it.
    - The right to be forgotten in the Bill might spell a danger to press freedom.
- An exemption "for journalistic purpose" is provided in Section 47 saying that where the processing of personal data is necessary for or relevant to a journalistic purpose
    - It says Section 27(1) applies only where the journalist demonstrates that the processing is in compliance with any code of ethics issued by —
        - the Press Council of India,
        - any media self-regulatory organization.
    - This means the journalist has to prove that privacy was taken care (Section 4) and all safeguards prescribed were complied with (Section 31).
    - These are additional pre-publication restrictions on citizens and media which were never contemplated by the Constitution and rejected by the judiciary.
- A citizen seeking access to such information will be confused whether to approach the CIC or DPA — these adjudicating officers are subordinate to members of the Data Protection Authority.

World Over

- This concept is prevalent in the European Union (EU) and France, though it was not preferred in the US to the more valuable press freedom.

Conclusion

- Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution did not provide "privacy" as a ground for imposing restrictions.
- This Bill fails on constitutional verification by the judiciary, unless "privacy" is added in Article 19(2) by a major amendment to the Constitution.
- The Data Protection Bill is going to be a serious threat to press freedom and RTI.

Smart Village / Smart Gram

- It is a humane, hi-tech and happy village which ensures an enhanced quality of life that contributes to the harmony, happiness, and well-being of all the villagers.

Some of the initiatives under this program

- Training Centre
- Gram Sachivalaya
- Wellness Centre
- Water ATM
- Sanitary Napkin Production Centre

Locate Public Toilets on Google Maps

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, under the aegis of Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban (SBM – U), has partnered with Google to launch the Loo Review campaign to encourage all local guides in India to rate and review public toilets on Google Maps.
- 500+ cities in India with more than 30,000 toilets with the name of "SBM Toilet" are currently live on Google Maps.
- Objectives of the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban (SBM – U) is to provide sanitation coverage through public toilet facilities across cities in India for achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status.
- With around 3400cities already having achieved ODF status, and other cities gearing up towards the same, there is now a need to ensure that the ODF status is sustained through continuous usage and proper maintenance of public toilets.

12. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Accidental deaths: 25% of all in India are weather-related

Context

- Weather-related deaths are on the rise globally and figures in India stand at a staggering 25%, noted a study conducted across the country from 2001-2014 by research-based organization Population Council.
- The study was Titled 'Extreme Weather Event-Induced Deaths in India 2001–2014: Trends and Differentials by Region, Sex and Age Group'

Details

The current study assessed the magnitude of loss of human lives due to extreme weather events and examined the region, State and the demographics most affected

- From 2001-2014, 25% of all accidental deaths in India due to unnatural causes happened as a result of extreme weather events adding that men and the elderly were at maximum risk.
- Most deaths reported were due to lightning (40%), followed by extreme precipitation (24%), heatwave (20%) and cold wave (15%).
- The study also found that a higher number of males died due to extreme weather events than females across all years and regions in the country.
- A higher proportion of individuals who were 60 years or older died due to cold (47%) and heat (42%) waves than those in the younger age groups.
    - In fact, four-fifths of the deaths due to cold and heatwaves were among individuals aged 44 years or older

Year	Number of extreme weather events	Accidental deaths due to all unnatural causes	Accidental deaths due to extreme weather events	% deaths due to extreme weather events*
2001	119	36,651	3,906	10.7 (3.80)
2002	106	16,723	4,996	29.9 (4.78)
2003	113	14,954	4,898	32.8 (4.61)
2004	110	18,937	4,638	24.5 (4.30)
2005	111	22,415	6,212	27.7 (5.67)
2006	110	21,502	5,753	26.8 (5.17)
2007	111	25,153	6,582	26.2 (5.83)
2008	111	23,993	5,727	23.9 (5.00)
2009	107	22,255	5,503	24.7 (4.74)
2010	112	25,066	6,629	26.4 (5.63)
2011	110	23,690	5,562	23.5 (4.59)
2012	102	22,960	5,704	24.8 (4.59)
2013	110	22,759	6,314	27.7 (5.01)
2014	101	20,175	6,119	30.3 (4.80)
Total	1,533	3,17,233	78,543	

■ FILE PHOTO SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

SOURCE: STUDY BY POPULATION COUNCIL | * % (DEATHS/MILLION)

Regions Affected

- The burden of deaths was the highest in central India, and Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal were affected the most by extreme weather events.

Concerns

Loss of human lives due to extreme weather events can have an impact on both macro and micro levels.

- At the micro level, the death of an individual can bring mental distress to the family and the loved ones.
    - Moreover, the death of an income-generating individual can have more serious consequences as it can throw a household into the poverty trap.
- At the macro level, the demographic structure can change if deaths from a particular age or sex are more frequent

Challenges

- In India, these extreme events each year are a challenge for governments and policymakers due to the extent of damage, diversity and distribution of extreme events, and size of the population affected.

Kolkata launches first flood forecast system

Context

- The Kolkata Municipal Corporation, with the support of the Asian Development Bank with assistance of $1 million for design and implementation, launched the country's first flood forecasting and early-warning system

Details

- The ultrasonic sensors will be fixed at the key points across the city, such as the hot spots identified as vulnerable to inundation during flood events, canals, pumping stations, traffic junctions and schools will send real-time data to a cloud based dashboard.
- It will provide real-time data on inundation, rainfall intensity, temperature, air quality and other climate-related data.
- Risk information will then be shared with citizens and community group through mobile alerts and radio and television messaging, to help them plan their daily activities such as commuting based on early warning and real-time inundation status.

Significance

- It will reduce the economic loss and impacts on livelihoods and improve flood awareness and safety and community levels
- It will help the administration to cope with flood situations more effectively and bring down losses of both lives and property.
- This is expected to help policy-makers make informed decisions during disasters.

Typhoon Jebi

Context

- Japan has been hit by its most powerful storm in a quarter of a century. Typhoon Jebi has raked the west of the country, killing at least 10 people and leaving a trail of destruction to infrastructure.

What makes Japan so good at responding to natural disasters?

- Japan sits on both the Pacific typhoon belt and the seismic Ring of Fire, meaning it receives far more than its fair share of extreme natural events of all kinds. This has provided the opportunity to plan and prepare for future events, and huge sums have been invested in building infrastructure to survive everything nature throws at it.

- Roads and public buildings in coastal cities like Osaka are designed to allow excess water and rainfall to flow away efficiently
- Advanced coastal defences can reduce the risk of a storm surge.
- The construction of private buildings is strictly regulated to adhere at all times to best practices, with natural disasters in mind.
- Awareness from a young age
    - Children go through drills on what to do when a major natural event strikes, and learn about their country's disaster-ridden history.
    - It is a grassroots approach that has made disaster preparedness an enduring national priority
- Before Typhoon Jebi struck, Japan issued more than 1.2 million evacuation notices
    - Beyond public awareness and building codes, Japan's government also sets an example to the world of how different ministries and jurisdictions work together in the event of a disaster.
    - officials have also invested time and effort in preparing agreements with the private sector so that, before the first winds or raindrops even hit, private companies that could help out with the disaster response know what their responsibilities are.

Understanding older people's vulnerabilities

- Although older people are a very diverse group, many are especially vulnerable to emergencies and hazards. Those with progressive loss of function in particular can have difficulty adapting to challenges and coping with disruptions.

There are four key reasons explaining older people's heightened vulnerability in the face of climate-related shocks:

- Physical decline that comes with ageing, which can include poor health, mobility, sight and hearing.
- Lack of provision of adequate services for older people, both on a daily basis and in emergency situations.
- Age discrimination, which serves to exclude and isolate older people, and often violates their rights.
- Poverty levels among older people, often exacerbated by lack of social protection mechanisms and livelihood opportunities.

Advantages of engaging elderly in Disaster Management

- As village elders and traditional knowledge-holders, older people can be a valuable source of information on local hazard and risk profiles, and sustainable community-based mitigation strategies.
- Older women, in particular, play an important role in supporting family members and grandchildren. As well as having their own protection needs during a crisis, their role as carers of other vulnerable groups also needs to be considered who can help in psychological recovery.
- Older people may not be as heavily engaged in day-to-day economic activities as younger people, and so may be able to spend more time on Disaster Risk Reduction actions, while encouraging other community members to get involved too.
- Older people may be able to recall details about the impact of previous local disasters (and the response effort), highlighting what could be improved.
    - Experience shows that with the right kind of support, older people can use their historical knowledge to complement scientific and technological developments to strengthen key DRR and preparedness measures

Measures to be taken

- Buddy system:
    - Volunteers will accompany vulnerable older people to distribution sites and ensure they received the humanitarian assistance they were entitled to.
- Education:
    - Increasing awareness and knowledge about disasters and how older people experience and respond to them. This includes specific training for health professionals working in disaster risk management and for older persons at all levels of society.
- Communication:
    - Providing timely, accurate, and practical information that is easy to understand.
- Ensuring that relevant departments, local authorities and emergency responders have specific budget lines for meeting older people's needs and utilizing their contributions.

13. GEOGRAPHY

Celestial misfit: Pluto a planet or not?

Background

- After years of arguing over whether Pluto is a planet, in 2006 the International Astronomical Union (IAU) voted to remove Pluto's planetary status.
- The IAU, in 2006, designated Pluto a 'dwarf planet' along with Ceres in the asteroid belt and Xena, an object in the Kuiper belt, which is an icy ring of frozen objects that circle the solar system beyond Neptune's orbit.

Three conditions for a celestial object to be called a planet:

- one, it must orbit the Sun;
- two, it should be massive enough to acquire an approximately spherical shape;
- Three, it has to 'clear its orbit', that is, be the object that exerts the maximum gravitational pull within its orbit.

Why was Pluto removed from the tag?

- Pluto is affected by Neptune's gravity, it is deflected by Neptune's gravity and so Neptune dominates its position
- It also shares its orbit with the frozen objects in the Kuiper belt.
- Based on this, the IAU deemed that Pluto did not 'clear its orbit'.
- Dwarf planets, on the other hand, need only satisfy the first two conditions.

The three formula rule questioned

- This rationale has been questioned by Philip Metzger, a planetary physicist who has worked with the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and others who have studied the history of classifying planets
- They point out that the only work in history that used this rule to classify planets was an article by William Herschel in 1802. They also argue that this work was based on reasoning and observations that have since been disproved.
- Physics has many examples where an idea was once discarded for being incorrect, and much later emerged in a different form and gained acceptance — the concept of photons, for instance

Complications of accepting Pluto as Planet

- And then again, if Pluto were to be re-designated a planet, many more complications would arise.
- For one thing, Charon, Pluto's moon, is much too large to be called a satellite. Judging by this, the Charon-Pluto system should then rightly be called a binary planet system. This would then lead to classifying several other sets of bodies as binary planets.

- Recent research shows that both the Kuiper Belt and the Oort cloud, a shell of objects that surrounds the entire solar system far beyond the Kuiper belt, contain objects that can then be called planets, thereby complicating the issue.

Conclusion

- Denying planetary status to Pluto is then nothing less than a sweep of Occam's razor, and Pluto remains a dwarf planet, albeit an exceptional one.

Mount Paektu/ Baekdu Mountain

- Mount Paektu straddles the North Korea-China border and can be reached from China, where it is known as Changbai Mountain
- As the highest mountain on the Korean peninsula at about 2,750 metres (9,000 ft) above sea level, Mount Paektu is the mythical origin of the Korean people, featuring in South Korea's national anthem and various North Korean propaganda.
- An active volcano, Mount Paektu is dotted with secret camps and historical sites from Korea's guerrilla war against the occupying Japanese in the 1940s.
- A large crater lake, called Heaven Lake, is in the caldera atop the mountain.

Context

- South Korea's Moon visits sacred North Korean mountain with Kim

14. HISTORY

Marathwada Liberation Day/ Hyderabad Liberation Day

- It is celebrated in Maharashtra on 17 September annually.
- It marks the anniversary of Marathwada's integration with India when the Indian military, with help of local population, defeated the State of Hyderabad, overthrew the Nizam and merged Hyderabad into the Indian Union

Background

- India got independence on August 15, 1947 but the Marathwada region was ruled by seventh Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan.
    - His princely state included current Marathwada and Telangana regions
- During the revolt Marathwada saw major uprisings against the Razakars of Nizam.
    - The main leaders of the revolt were Swami Ramanand Tirth, Govindbhai Shroff, Vijayendra Kabra and Ramanbhai Parikh and P H Patwardhan.
- Amidst the unrest the Indian government launched a military operation named Operation Polo which it termed a "police action".
- After one year, one month and two days that is on September 17, 1948, Marathwada was freed from the clutches of Nizam rule in police action, initiated by then Union Home minister Sardar Vallabbhai Patel and was merged with in Indian Republic.
- During the Muktisangram (freedom movement), the people of Marathwada as well as those of Telangana and Karnataka made significant contribution against the Nizam rule and even laid their lives
    - Marathwada, Telangana and 4 districts of Karnataka were part of the former princely Hyderabad state

Tileswari Barua

- She was shot at the age of 12 by the British on September 20, 1942, during the Quit India Movement when she and some freedom fighters tried to unfurl the Tricolour atop a police station.
- Dhekiajuli town in Sonitpur district observes September 20 as Martyrs' Day
- Tileswari was a little behind Monbor Nath, who headed the local mrityu vahini and was leading the group.
    - When Nath defied orders of the police officer and climbed atop the police station, he was gunned down within a few seconds.
    - Other volunteers followed, one by one. Tileswari was the fourth to be hit by the bullet after Nath, Kumoli Devi and Mohiram Koch

Context

- After 76 years, an effort is on to identify martyrs who succumbed to injuries a day or two after the firing on September 20, 1942.
- The State government handed over a cheque ₹5 lakh each to the survivors of nine named martyrs, including Tileswari, who had signed up for a suicide squad at age 12.

15. MISCELLANEOUS

Amitava Roy Committee on Jail reforms

Context

- The Supreme Court constituted a three-member committee headed by former Justice Amitava Roy to look into jail reforms across the country and suggest measures to deal with them.

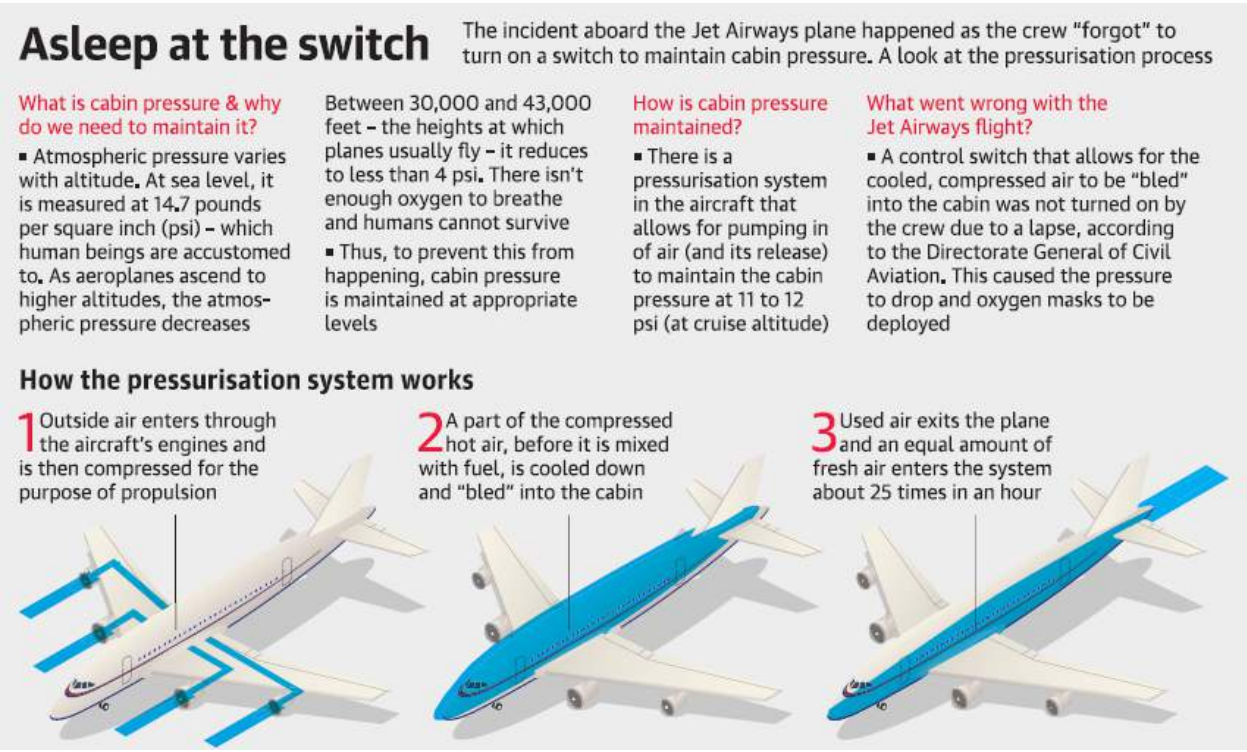
Details

- The committee will look into problems in jails, including over-crowding and challenges faced by women prisoners.

Bleed Switch

Context

- Around 30 passengers on a Jet Airways Mumbai-Jaipur flight suffered ear and nose bleeds due to low cabin pressure during the flight's climb.
- The Jet Airways crew forgot to activate what is known as the "bleed switch".
- The air pressure in the cabin dropped and oxygen masks got deployed.



EyeROV TUNA

Context

- India's first underwater robotic drone which can send real-time videos of ships and other underwater structures to help with their repair and maintenance, was launched and handed over to the Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL) of DRDO.

Details

- The first commercial Remotedly Operated Vehicle (ROV)/underwater drone, named EyeROV TUNA, was developed by EyeROV Technologies, a company incubating at Kalamassery-based Maker Village, Kochi.
- It is the largest hardware incubator in the country.
- NPOL, a laboratory of Delhi-headquartered Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), made the first order of the product.
- It can be navigated up to a depth of 50 metres to take real-time HD video images to examine ship hulls or undersea cables or bridge moorings, eliminating the need for costlier and riskier manual inspection by divers

Oont Kadal

- It is a hump-backed bridge, locally known as Oont (Camel) Kadal in kashmir lies in the middle of the Dal Lake
- It was built in the times of the ruler Shah Mir Sultan for the parking of Dongas that ferried tourists and locals who wished to take a tour of the Mughal garden 'Nishat Bagh'.
- Dal Lake is prone to strong winds and windstorms making it impossible for Dongas and Shikaras to cross over. This link road came into existence for public convenience and also for Dongas and Shikaras to rest and anchor their boats during storms.
- Trees are also planted on both the sides of the road which provide shade to the pedestrians and also cut the strong winds.

Context

- The iconic 17th-century bridge, Oont Kadal will be restored through a conservation project with the help of Germany.

Project kalpavriksha

- It is a coconut guidance project provided free of cost covering almost 6,000 ryots in T.N., Kerala

Swayangsiddha

- Swayangsiddha means self-reliance.
- It is an initiative by West Bengal Police aims to combat human trafficking and prevent child marriage.
- It envisions empowering young girls and boys with knowledge and skills so that they are aware, alert, able to make informed choices and are less vulnerable to violation and abuse of their rights.
- Swayangsiddha Groups have been formed in schools and colleges with interested students.
    - These groups were formed with students between the age group of 12 to 21 years.
- Child Protection Committee is monitoring and guiding these groups.

India's first woman IAS officer dead

Context

- India's first woman IAS officer after Independence, Anna Rajam Malhotra, who served in the Madras State under then Chief Minister C. Rajagopalachari and at the Central government, died in Mumbai

Details

- Anna cracked her Civil Services examination back in 1950, and was requested by the panel to join either Foreign service or Central service despite her merit. However, Anna stood her ground and was given a secretarial post instead of district sub-collector by the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.
- Ms. Malhotra joined the civil services in 1951 and opted for the Madras cadre.
- She became the first woman to hold a secretarial post in the Central government.

Work profile

- She successfully executed the construction of India's first computerized port Nhava Sheva (Jawaharlal Nehru Port) in Mumbai as its chairperson.
- She travelled with Indira Gandhi to eight States to understand the food production pattern despite her ankles being broken.

Police forces in 6 UTs merged

Context

- The Ministry of Home Affairs notified new rules amalgamating police forces in six Union Territories.

Objective

- It is being viewed as the first step towards the creation of a central police cadre allowing for the posting of police personnel across the country irrespective of the force they are initially inducted into.

Why was this move taken?

- Currently these postings were decided by the respective UT administrators.
- A central pool allowing inter-transferability would also ensure that local police personnel do not fall prey to serving vested interests in their home services
- It is to ensure that they don't become complacent

Details

- The National Capital Territory of Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Chandigarh (Police Service) Rules 2018 was notified
- The rules effectively mean that officers who are not direct IPS recruits could be posted in any of the six UTs and will be at the disposal of the Ministry.
- The post/grade/service eligible for induction into the Entry Grade for the new service, according to the notification, would include personnel currently employed as inspectors in the Delhi Police, A&N Islands Police, Lakshadweep Police, Daman & Diu Police, Dadra and Nagar Haveli Police and Chandigarh Police.
- There are around 533 posts that will be covered under the new rules; they include assistant commissioners of police and deputy superintendent of police.
- The Rules will come into effect upon the promotion or direct recruitment of Inspectors to the post of ACP.

- Half of the posts at the ACP rank will be filled through direct recruitment and the other half through promotion.

'Fat' traces confirm Dickinsonia to be world's earliest animals

- A strange fossil that looks a bit like a giant leaf, or a fingerprint the size of a coffee table, has intrigued scientists for decades.
- Thousands of the fossils have been found over the past seven decades, revealing that it lived at the bottom of the ocean, without a mouth, intestines or anus, half a billion years ago.

Dickinsonia (earth's earliest known animal)

- After digging one of the fossils off a cliff in Russia (near the White Sea in the northwest of Russia) and analysing its contents, researchers discovered molecules of cholesterol, a type of fat.
- This confirms that the creature, known as Dickinsonia, is the earth's earliest known animal.
- Dickinsonia contained rib-like segments the length of its oval-shaped body, which came in a variety of sizes and could grow as large as 4.6 feet.
- The analysis showed the animals were abundant 558 million years ago, millions of years earlier than previously thought.
- The creature was part of the Ediacara Biota that lived on the earth during a time when bacteria reigned, 542-635 million years ago.
- Dickinsonia could be an ancestor of many forms of animal life today including worms and insects.

Edicarian Period

- The Edicarian Period was about 20 million years prior to emergence of modern animal life — a period known as the Cambrian explosion.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following statements:
1. The Constitution of India provides for a Uniform Civil Code as a fundamental duty.
2. Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India proposes to replace the personal laws based on religion and customs with a set of common laws.
Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

2. Consider the following statements:
1. The first complete census in India was taken in the year 1881.
2. The census has been conducted by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

3. Consider the following statements:
1. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of nations in South Asia.
2. Its member states include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

4. Consider the following statements:
1. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is a relief and human development agency which supports registered Palestinian refugees, and their descendants.
2. Under UNRWA Aid is provided in five areas of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.
Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

5. The Global Investment Trends Monitor is published by
a) World economic Forum
b) UNCTAD
c) World Bank
d) WTO

6. Consider the following statements about Aranmula:

1. It is celebrated in Tamilnadu
2. It is a dedicated to Lord Krishna and Arjuna
Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

7. Look at the following statements about Fields medal:
1. It is called as mathematician's "Nobel Prize".
2. It is awarded annually to mathematicians under 40 years of age.
Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

8. The Vishakha Guidelines is related to:
a) Sexual harassment
b) Child Marriage
c) Dowry
d) Online media control

9. Orang National Park is on the banks of River
a) Brahmaputra
b) Barak
c) Indus
d) Sutlej

10. Rohingyas are indigenous to
a) Bangladesh
b) Malaysia
c) Bhutan
d) Myanmar

11. Consider the following statements:
1. Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) was constituted by the Central Government, under the chairmanship of Kasturi Rangan
2. WGEEP issued recommendations for the preservation of the western peninsular region.
Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

12. Consider the following statements:
1. Nabakalebara festival is an ancient ritual that is observed in the Shree Jagannath Temple at Puri
2. Jagannath Temple and Sun Temple of Konark was built by King Chodaganhadeva in 12th century.
Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

13. Consider the following statements:
1. 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".
2. 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.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

14. Consider the following statements:
1. Antibiotic resistance is the ability of all microbes to resist the effects of medication.
2. Those considered extensively drug-resistant (XDR) or totally drug resistant (TDR) are sometimes called "superbugs".
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

15. Consider the following statements:
1. Money laundering is the process of creating the appearance that large amounts of money obtained from criminal activity, such as drug trafficking or terrorist activity, originated from a legitimate source.
2. Layering is the act of concealing the source of that money.
3. Placement refers to the act of introducing "dirty money" (money obtained through illegitimate, criminal means) into the financial system.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) All of the above

16. Consider the following statements:
1. Biosaline agriculture is a relatively new way of dealing with salinity in agriculture.
2. Biosaline agriculture develops cropping systems for saline environments.
3. Use of saline soil- and water-resources and improved soil and water management is not a part of Biosaline agriculture.
Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) All of the above

17. Consider the following statements:
1. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization(CDSCO) is the national regulatory body for Indian pharmaceuticals and medical devices
2. CDSCO is under the administrative control of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

1. Genetically modified mustard is also known as Dhara Mustard Hybrid (DMH 11).
2. DMH 11 is genetically modified variety of Herbicide Tolerant (HT) mustard.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

19. Consider the following statements about GEAC - Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee:
1. GEAC is apex body under Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change for regulating manufacturing, use, import, export and storage of hazardous micro-organisms or genetically engineered organisms (GMOs).
2. GEAC is also responsible for giving technical approval of proposals relating to release of GMOs and products including experimental field trials.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

20. Consider the following statements about Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):
1. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the six Asia-Pacific states ((Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
2. RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).
Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) All of the above

21. Consider the following statements:
1. Foreign portfolio investment is part of a country's capital account and shown on its balance of payments (BOP).
2. FPI lets an investor purchase stocks, bonds or other financial assets in a foreign country.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

22. Consider the following statements:
1. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) is a U.S. trade program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world.
2. MFN requires WTO member countries to treat imports coming from all other WTO member countries equally by imposing equal tariffs on them.
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

23. Consider the following statements:
1. Competition Commission of India was established to prevent the activities that have an adverse effect on competition in India.
2. Competition Act 2002 is a tool to implement and enforce competition policy and to prevent and punish anti-competitive business practices by firms and unnecessary Government interference in the market.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

24. Consider the following statements:
1. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 to provide free Legal Services to the weaker sections of the society and to organize Lok Adalats.
2. In every District, District Legal Services Authority has been constituted to implement Legal Services Programmes in the District.
Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

25. Consider the following statements:
1. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2001 was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.
2. The Act defines a child as any person below eighteen years of age.
Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

26. Consider the following statements:
1. Nuclear disarmament is the act of reducing or eliminating nuclear weapons.
2. The term denuclearization is also used to describe the process leading to complete nuclear disarmament.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

27. Consider the following statements:
1. An electric car is one that runs on, and is 'charged up' with, electric power. Petrol or diesel is sometimes used to refuel an electric car.
2. Hybrid cars have electric elements to their power trains but cannot be considered 'electric cars' due to the presence of a petrol engine.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

28. Consider the following statements:

1. Bestiality is a paraphilia involving a sexual fixation on non-human animals
2. Zoophilia is a cross-species sexual activity between human and non-human animals.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

29. Consider the following statements:
1. COMCASA is one of the three foundational defence pacts that needs to be signed by a country in order to obtain high-tech military hardware from the US.
2. The COMCASA agreement will give Indian military access to function on high-end secured and encrypted communication equipment which are installed on American platforms obtained by Indian Armed Forces.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

30. Consider the following statements:
1. Chabahar port lies in the Gulf of Aden
2. It is the only Iranian port with direct access to the ocean
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

31. Which of these foundational defence pacts has India NOT signed, with the US to obtain high-tech military hardware?
a) LEMOA – Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
b) COMCASA – Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement
c) GSOMIA – General Security Of Military Information Agreement
d) BECA – Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation

32. Consider the following statements:
1. Indian Medical Association is a statutory body.
2. It is a national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

33. Consider the following statements:
a) PASSEX: India- Pakistan
b) SLINEX: India- Sri Lanka
c) CORPAT: India- Thailand
d) VARUNA-18: India – France
Which of the options is not correctly matched?

34. Consider the following statements:
1. India is signatory to Chemical Weapons convention.

2. India has signed NPT.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

35. Idlib recently in news is in the region of
a) Afghanistan
b) Syria
c) Iran
d) Pakistan

36. With reference to exercise kakadu
1. It is an annual exercise
2. It derives its name from an extinct bird
3. It is held in Australia
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) Only 1 and 2
b) Only 2 and 3
c) Only 1 and 3
d) All of the above

37. Rapid Trident Military Exercises was conducted by
a) China
b) Ukraine
c) Japan
d) United Kingdom

38. Consider the following statements:
1. Article 161 of Constitution of India deals with Power of Governor to grant pardons, etc., and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.
2. Article 161 applies only to offences against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

39. Consider the following statements:
1. China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) aims to facilitate trade along an overland route that connects Kashmir and Gwadar.
2. CPEC is considered to be an extension of China's ambitious One Belt, One Road initiative.
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

40. Consider the following statements:
1. Rafale is the first fighter aircraft deal signed by India with other country since the purchase of Sukhoi aircrafts from Russia.

2. The Rafale is a twin-engine fighter, multi-role fighter aircraft manufactured by French aviation company Dassault.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

41. Consider the following statements:
1. The difference between total revenue and total expenditure of the government is termed as fiscal deficit.
2. Current Account Deficit means the value of imports of goods/services/investment incomes is greater than the value of exports.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

42. Consider the following statements with respect to Gatka:
1. It is a traditional martial art associated with Sikhism.
2. It is a traditional South Asian form of combat-training in which wooden sticks are used to simulate swords.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

43. Consider the following statements about Animal Welfare Board of India:
1. It is a statutory advisory body on Animal Welfare Laws and promotes animal welfare in the country.
2. It was established in 1962 under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

44. Consider the following statements:
1. Eastern Economic Forum is an international forum held in Vladivostok, Russia, for the purpose of encouraging foreign investment in the Russian Far East.
2. Vostok 2018 is a large-scale Russian military exercise.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

45. Consider the following statements:
1. The International Criminal Court -ICC was setup in 2002 with a jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute the world's worst crimes, including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.
2. The International Criminal Court -ICC is based in Hague, Netherlands.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only

c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

46. Consider the following statements:
1. India's first missile tracking ship will be built by Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL).
2. VC 11184 will be the first of its kind ocean surveillance ship .
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

47. Consider the following statements:
1. Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) is a scheme for providing loans upto 50 lakh to the non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises.
2. MUDRA loans are given by Commercial Banks, RRBs, Small Finance Banks, Cooperative Banks, MFIs and NBFCs.
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

48. Consider the following statements:
1. Ischaemia means a "reduced blood supply".
2. The coronary arteries supply blood to the heart muscle.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

49. Consider the following statements:
1. A non-communicable disease is a non-infectious health condition that cannot be spread from person to person.
2. The main types of non-communicable diseases include cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, malaria and diabetes.
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

50. Consider the following statements:
1. Ayushman Bharat is National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families.
2. Ayushman Bharat provides coverage upto 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

51. Consider the following statements:
1. Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a form of market intervention by the Government of India to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices.
2. The minimum support prices are announced by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

52. With reference to One IP- Two Dispensaries scheme
1. It is an initiative of Ministry of Health
2. It gives an option to an Insured Person (IP) to choose two dispensaries, one for self and another for family through an employer
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

53. Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary is in the state of
a) Karnataka
b) Kerala
c) Andhra Pradesh
d) Telangana

54. Consider the following statements with respect to Bhishtis:
1. They are the traditional water carriers of South Asia
2. They are tribe found in Mizoram
3. Bhishti is derived from the Tibetan word bahisht, meaning paradise
The incorrect code is:
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 3 only
d) All the statements

55. Jharnapatachitra is a painting from the region of
a) Maharashtra
b) West Bengal
c) Gujarat
d) Rajasthan

56. With reference to gambling and betting
1. It is in State list.
2. Law commission says it should be given permission but regulated.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

57. CIMON recently seen in news is related to
a) Elections app

b) Silk application
c) Mobility app by Niti ayog
d) Artificial intelligence

58. Consider the following statements about Geological Survey of India:
1. It comes under the control of Ministry of Tourism.
2. It is headquartered in Delhi.
3. It declares Geological Heritage Sites.
The correct code is:
a) 1 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

59. Khamsin as a geographical concept is closely related to
a) Sudden drop in temperatures in Deserts
b) Dusty wind in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula
c) Depression seen in Indian oceans causing cyclones in India
d) El Nino in Central Pacific

60. Which of the following is responsible for coral bleaching in the oceans?
a) Chlorine
b) Hydrochloric Acid
c) Carbonic Acid
d) None of the above

61. Which of the following is related to trade disputes between India and USA?
a) Compulsory Licensing
b) CAATSA
c) LEMOA
d) COMCASA

62. Which of the following is not an objective under UDAN?
a) To provide for affordable, low-cost domestic air travel.
b) To revive existing airstrips and airports.
c) To enhance air connectivity to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.
d) To provide for inclusive growth through better connectivity.

63. Which of the following statement is true?
a) PSLV is a 3-stage solid fuelled rocket.
b) India's Mars mission was launched by a GSLV rocket.
c) GSLV rocket has no strap-on motors.
d) GSLV engine makes use of cryogenic technology.

64. Consider the following statements:
1. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) of India is an executive organisation.
2. It Co-ordinates the activities of the State Pollution Control Boards by providing technical assistance and guidance.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

65. Consider the following statements:
1. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has been vested with powers to hear any matter relating to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Indian Forest Act, 1927.
2. The NGT has the power to hear all civil cases relating to environmental issues and questions.
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

66. Consider the following statements:
1. Biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) is the amount of dissolved oxygen (DO) needed (i.e., demanded) by aerobic biological organisms to break down organic material.
2. BOD can be used as a gauge of the effectiveness of wastewater treatment plants.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

67. Consider the following statements:
1. Transponder is mainly used in satellite communication to transfer the received signals.
2. When the amplitude of carrier wave is changed in accordance with the intensity of the signal, the process is called frequency modulation.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

68. With reference to Maluti Project:
1. It involves linking of Ancient temples across India.
2. It would enhance tourism in Rural India but also encourage cultural awareness.
Which of the above statements are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

69. Jataka Stories is related to
a) Buddha attaining enlightenment
b) Previous births of Gautama Buddha in both human and animal form.
c) Buddha leaving his home, family and kingdom in search of truth
d) Teachings by Buddha

70. Consider the following statements about Kanthasth:
1. It is an initiative of Ministry of Culture.
2. It is a computer software for translating all kinds of official files from English to Hindi.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

71. Which of these are not included in the UNESCO's 'Intangible Heritage' list?
a) Kumbh Mela
b) Thathera
c) Yakshagana
d) Manipuri Sankirtana

72. Consider the following statements about Aravalli:
1. It is the oldest range of Fold Mountains in India.
2. Guru Shikhar is the highest point of the Aravalli Range.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

73. Hurricane Florence recently in news caused devastation in
a) Japan
b) USA
c) Brazil
d) Australia

74. Consider the following statements about the 'Kuiper belt':
1. The 'Kuiper belt' is an icy ring of frozen objects that circle the solar system beyond Neptune's orbit.
2. Short-period comets (which take less than 200 years to orbit the Sun) originate in the Kuiper Belt.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

75. Consider the following statements about the 'Oort Cloud':
1. The 'Oort Cloud' is essentially an extended shell of icy objects that exist in the outermost reaches of the solar system.
2. The 'Oort Cloud' is roughly spherical, and is thought to be the origin of most of the long-period comets that have been observed till date.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

76. The Akash short-range surface-to-air missile (SRSAM) system was recently in the news. Consider the following statements relating to this.
1. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) developed Akash as part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme initiated in 1984.
2. Akash has a range of 25 km and can engage multiple targets at a time in all-weather conditions.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

77. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect with respect to the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015?

1. It extends to the whole of India.
2. It applies to all the matters concerning children in need of protection.
3. It allows for juveniles in conflict with Law in the age group of 16–18, involved in Heinous Offences, to be tried as adults.
Choose the correct option:
a) 1 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) None of the above

78. Which of the following statements is incorrect with respect to the Belt and Road Initiative?
a) It is a development strategy adopted by the Chinese government.
b) The initiative focuses on connectivity and cooperation between Eurasian countries.
c) The Silk Road Economic Belt will link China to Central and South Asia and onward to Europe.
d) None of the above

79. Which of the following statement/s about government of India act, 1935 are incorrect?
1. This act removed diarchy in Centre but recommended adoption of diarchy at the provinces.
2. It extended the communal representation.
Options:
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

80. Base Erosion Profit Sharing project is related to
a) Taming inflation
b) Curbing Tax evasion
c) Reducing the NPA's
d) Reducing the balance sheet erosion of corporate firms

81. Consider the following statements with respect to the Tiwa tribe:
1. It is an ethnic group/indigenous tribe inhabiting the states of Assam and Meghalaya.
2. They are recognized as a Scheduled tribe within the State of Assam.
3. A striking peculiarity of the Tiwa is their division into two sub-groups, Hill Tiwa and Plains Tiwas, displaying contrasting cultural features.
Which of the above statement/s is/are incorrect?
a) 1 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 1 and 2 only
d) None of the above

82. Consider the following statements with respect to the Andh tribe:
1. They are a designated Scheduled Tribe in Telangana and Maharashtra.
2. Andh claim themselves to be the original descendants of Andhra dynasty or Satavahana dynasty that ruled around third century BC.
3. The Andhs live primarily in the hills of the Adilabad district.
Which of the above statement/s is/are incorrect?
a) 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 only
d) None of the above

83. Article 243G talks about the provisions related to powers, authority and responsibilities of panchayats. These matters for economic and social development of the villages are listed in:
a) Schedule 10
b) Schedule 11
c) Schedule 12
d) Schedule 7

84. Lists in the seventh schedule can be amended by passing a bill to this effect by
a) Simple majority in the Parliament
b) Special majority in the Parliament
c) Simple majority in the parliament and ratification by 2/3 rd of state legislatures
d) Special majority in the parliament and ratification by half the state legislatures

85. Consider the following statements:
I. A State government has no jurisdiction to determine the question of citizenship.
II. Although, this function can be delegated by the Central government on a state.
Choose the correct option:
b) Only i) is correct
b) Only ii) is correct
c) Both are correct
d) Both are incorrect

86. Consider the following statements regarding Right to Equality:
I. Socially and Educationally backward citizens or SCs or STs can get special treatment in admission to educational institutions.
II. Educational institutions cover private, aided, unaided and minority institutions.
Choose the correct option:
a) Only i) is correct
b) Only ii) is correct
c) Both are correct
d) Both are incorrect

87. Consider the following statements with regard to non-cooperation movement (NCM) and civil disobedience movement (CDM):
i. Muslim participation was higher in NCM as compared to CDM.
ii. Participation of peasants, lower caste people and women was higher in CDM than NCM.
iii. Indian National Congress was organisationally stronger during CDM.
Identify the incorrect statement/s:
a) None of the above
b) All the above
c) iii only
d) i only

88. With reference to the food web, consider the following statements:
i. The same food resource is part of more than one chain.
ii. A food web complexity decreases the chance of survival of the organisms in an Ecosystem by competition.
Select the correct answer using the codes given:
a) Only i
b) Only ii
c) Both i and ii
d) None of the above

89. Consider the following statements:
1. The H-1B category is an expedient and lawful method to bring foreign-born professionals permanently to the United States, and therefore one of the most widely sought after visa classifications for employment in the United States.
2. The H-2B visa non-immigrant program permits employers to hire foreign workers to come temporarily to the United States and perform temporary non-agricultural services or labor on a one-time, seasonal, peakload or intermittent basis.
3. The L-1 visa facilitates the temporary transfer of foreign worker in the managerial, executive or specialized knowledge category to the U.S. to continue employment with an office of the same employer, its parent branch, subsidiary or affiliate.
Choose the incorrect statements:
a) Only 1
b) Both 1 and 2
c) Both 2 and 3
d) 1, 2, and 3

90. Consider the following statements:
1. Swine influenza, also called pig influenza, swine flu, hog flu and pig flu, is an infection caused by any one of several types of swine influenza bacteria.
2. Influenza A (H1N1) is the subtype of influenza A that is the very rare cause of human influenza.
Choose the correct statements:
a) Only 1
b) Both 1 and 2
c) Only 2
d) None of the above

91. Choose the incorrect statement with respect to MUDRA Bank:
a) It is the vehicle to implement PM Mudra Yojana
b) It works under the Ministry of Finance
c) MUDRA Bank will be set up as a non – statutory body
d) It will partner all state/regional level coordinators to provide easy finance to even the remote investors.

92. What happens during National Emergency?
1. State Governments are suspended.
2. Legislative power of the State Legislatures is suspended.
Options:
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) None of the above

93. Which of the following statement/s is/are incorrect with respect to the National Human Rights Commission?
1. It is a statutory body established under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
2. It can regulate its own procedure.
3. It has no powers to punish the violators of human rights.
Options:
a) Only 1
b) Only 1 and 3
c) Only 2
d) None of the above

94. Consider the following statements in relation to Bhagat Singh: He was the first secretary of Punjab Naujawan Bharat Sabha.

i. He was firmly opposed to colonialism.
ii. He was a socialist with a secular outlook.
Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?
a) i) and ii) only
b) i) and iii) only
c) ii) and iii) only
d) All of the above

95. Which of the following was a part of Sher Shah Suri's administration?
i. Measurement of the sown land was done for revenue collection.
ii. Shiqdar was in charge of the general administration of a Pargana.
iii. Customs duty was imposed on the goods only at two places to promote trade and commerce.
Options:
a) i) only
b) i) and ii) only
c) i) and iii) only
d) All of the above

96. Consider the following statements with respect to The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA):
i. It is the main deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the UN.
ii. It is the only principal organ of the United Nations (UN) in which all member nations have equal representation.
iii. Its powers are to oversee the budget of the UN and appoint the non-permanent members to the Security Council.
Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?
a) i) and ii) only
b) ii) and iii) only
c) i) and iii) only
d) All of the above

97. What is a Commercial Paper?
i. It is an unsecured promissory note.
ii. It has a fixed maturity of not more than 364 days.
iii. It is a money-market security issued by large corporations to obtain funds.
iv. It carries lower interest repayment rates than bonds due to the shorter maturities.
Options:
a) i) and ii) only
b) ii), iii) and iv) only
c) i), iii) and iv) only
d) All of the above

98. Which of the following bodies is the apex research organisation for carrying out taxonomic studies on wild plant resources?
a) National Biodiversity Authority
b) Forest Survey of India
c) Botanical Survey of India
d) Zoological Survey of India

99. Article 72 confers pardoning power on the President in cases:
a) With death sentence
b) Where sentence is by court martial
c) For offence against law
d) All of the above

100. Consider the following:
i. Securities Appellate Tribunal is a statutory body.
ii. It was established under the provisions of the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992.
iii. Its primary function is to hear and dispose of appeals against orders passed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India.
Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?
a) i) and ii) only
b) ii) and iii) only
c) i) and iii) only
d) All of the above

10. Which of the statement/s below is/are incorrect?
i. Nonconvertible debentures are unsecured bonds that cannot be converted to company equity or stock
ii. Nonconvertible debentures usually have higher interest rates than convertible debentures.
a) i) only
b) ii) only
c) Both i) and ii)
d) None of the above

ANSWER KEY

1	A
2	C
3	C
4	D
5	B
6	B
7	B
8	A
9	A
10	D
11	B
12	C
13	C
14	B
15	D
16	A
17	C
18	C
19	C
20	C
21	C
22	D
23	C
24	C
25	B
26	C
27	B
28	D
29	D
30	B
31	D
32	B
33	A
34	A
35	B
36	A
37	B
38	C
39	A
40	C
41	C
42	C
43	C
44	C
45	C
46	D
47	A
48	C
49	B

50	C
51	A
52	B
53	B
54	B
55	B
56	C
57	D
58	C
59	B
60	C
61	A
62	C
63	D
64	B
65	A
66	C
67	A
68	A
69	B
70	B
71	C
72	C
73	B
74	C
75	C
76	C
77	A
78	D
79	A
80	B
81	D
82	D
83	B
84	D
85	C
86	A
87	A
88	A
89	A
90	D
91	C
92	D
93	D
94	D
95	D
96	D
97	D
98	C
99	D
100	D

101	D

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Despite an uncertain international environment and volatile crude oil prices, India's sustained growth reflects its strong resilience to adverse global conditions, because of strong economic fundamentals.
2. India's criminal justice system is in ICU. Analyze
3. Mergers of school initiated by the Government is negligence on the part of the government. Critically examine.
4. The pink bollworm is a disaster to the farmers who are already under the pressure of loan and abnormal Monsoons. Discuss the implications and steps that needs to be taken
5. Despite India being the world's fastest growing large economy, it needs to grow even faster to spur job creation. Comment
6. 70% of India's coastal areas are prone to tsunamis and cyclones, about 60% of its landmass vulnerable to earthquakes; yet, risk management is still in its infancy. Examine and suggest measures to improve resilience
7. What is Debt Trap diplomacy? To what extent should India be intimidated by the Chinese way of influencing its control over smaller countries dependent on aid and investments?
8. Soil degradation due to flooding is a serious concern. A 2014 review of soil degradation in India by multiple institutions shows that an estimated 14 million hectares suffer soil degradation due to flooding annually. Comment
9. The Indian government must realize that its consistent undermining of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) because of problems with Pakistan is also weakening Afghanistan's engagement with the subcontinent, which India had worked hard to foster. Discuss.
10. India is a rising power looking for a greater say on the global stage, the U.S. should be sensitive to its core interests. In this context, Discuss the ticking issues between India and U.S.
11. The term 'Scheduled Caste' is the appropriate way to refer to the people in official communications and documents. However, it is strange to oppose the use of the term 'Dalit' which is a nomenclature chosen and used by the community itself.
12. Is Punjab's proposed introduction of IPC Section 295AA(blasphemy law) retrograde. Critically analyze.
13. Sexuality is now spoken as dignity, as mutual respect, as equality. Discuss with respect to the recent SC verdict on decriminalizing homosexuality
14. Indo – US ties have entered a "new era of growth" – critically analyse this statement in the context of the recent India-USA defense deal.
15. Will the New India Post Payment Bank hasten financial inclusion? Justify your stand.
16. Explain in details of RCEP's significance to India. What are the various challenges faced by India?
17. Self-Help Groups have not only empowered women, but have also brought about attitudinal change among all stakeholders towards women development.
18. What is evidence based Policy making? Explain how it can be adapted in India.
19. The Indian airline industry is facing turbulence. Estimates suggest that Indian carriers will incur a combined loss of $1.9 billion this fiscal. A number of long-term structural challenges are bogging the sector down. Discuss.
20. The doctrine of progressive realization of rights mandates that the laws of a country should be in consonance with its modern ethos, it should be "sensible" and "easy to apply". Comment with respect to the recent SC verdict decriminalizing Homosexuality
21. Rupee depreciation, rising bank bad loans or non-performing assets (NPAs), a trade deficit which is five-year high, and rising retail fuel prices,in the midst of these challenging trends, How can India sustain a robust economic growth? Discuss.
22. SEBI asked category II and III FPIs (not well-regulated in their countries of origin) to conform to a higher degree of KYC norms. At a time when the rupee is in freefall and struggling under external pressure questions have been raised about SEBI's handling of the issue and the need for wide consultation before drafting such regulations. Comment.
23. Public procurement in India is about 30% of GDP and most vulnerable to corruption. Discuss the challenges faced in Public procurement and suggest some measures to improve the present mechanism of procurement
24. There are several inconsistencies in compensation awarded for human-wildlife conflict — ranging from crop loss to human death — across the country. What are the issues involved in resolving the Human-Animal conflict? In what way can these issues be resolved?

25. India's relation with central Asian countries has failed to meet the expectations. Examine. Also, discuss what can India do overcome this issue?
26. The intellect has sharp eye for methods and tools, but is blind to ends and values. Illustrate with examples.
27. Explain the various technological tools that can be used in Disaster Management.
28. Poverty reduction is not only about schemes but also about behavioral Change. Analyze the statement in reference to Standard Economic Theory
29. What is adulteration of food? What are the existing laws and also explain the recommendations of FSSAI and Law commission to prevent adulteration of food?
30. Governance is not about regulations and rigid set of laws; it is about delivery of Services with less inconvenience to consumers. Does the Delhi Govt move of Door step delivery resonate this? Justify your View.
31. The civil aviation sector in India is in dire need of reforms. Evaluate.
32. Depreciation of the rupee is tied to the economic and foreign policy decisions of the US. Elaborate.
33. Explain how climate change can trigger bleaching of corals. What role do corals play in the marine ecosystem? Discuss the ongoing environmental crisis in the Great Barrier Reef.
34. Disposal of domestic sewage from cities and towns is the biggest source of pollution of water bodies in India. Dismal position of sewage treatment is the main cause of pollution of rivers and lakes. Critically examine.
35. India's sanitation problem is complex, and the absence of adequate toilets is only one lacuna. There needs to be an expansion of the sewer networks and a scheme for scientific maintenance will end manual cleaning of septic tanks. Suggest some measures that can be taken to reduce the menace of manual scavenging
36. Explain the significance of fire in Zoroastrianism.
37. Why is Laurie Baker called 'Gandhi of Indian architecture?
38. Krishnadeva Raya, the King of Vijayanagar, was not only an accomplished scholar himself but was also a great patron of learning and literature. Discuss
39. The businessmen, politician and Bureaucrat nexus breaks the structure of State control and suffocates Governance and undermines state independence. Analyze.
40. The merger of banks should be a long thought approach rather than adhoc process. Was the govt move of merger of banks appropriate? Examine
41. The concept of Universal Health Coverage has received much attention in recent months. Is it a workable reality or an ideal? Critically Analyze.
42. Citizen charter is a micro concept which demands continuous efforts to make it effective in India. Elucidate
43. UPSC is an unscientifically designed body to recruit civil servants scientifically. Comment.
44. Preamble of the Indian Constitution provides everything to test good governance in India. Elaborate.
45. Without normative approach, governance cannot be good. Comment.
46. Do you think that Indian Constitution is an example of acumen of constitutional assembly? Support your answer.
47. Many of the barriers to women empowerment lie ingrained in cultural norms. Discuss.
48. Arresting a man for triple talaq in one instance can actually destroy families. Critically analyse the statement in the context of triple talaq bill.
49. The Donald Trump administration is moving ahead with a proposal to end work permits for spouses of H-1B workers in the United States. Examine the impact of this decision on India.
50. We have not inherited the Earth from our forefathers but have borrowed it from our children – What do you understand by this statement?
51. Discuss the issues related to public healthcare infrastructure in India. Suggest ways to address these challenges
52. Citizens play the most important role in realization of a successful and vibrant democracy. Discuss
53. Judicial activism does not mean governance by the judiciary and the judiciary seems to have taken over governance of the country by default. In light of the above statement, analyse the rationality behind judicial activism
54. Analyse the contribution of political parties to the success of Indian democracy.
55. A multi-pronged strategy should be evolved, considering the magnitude of the atrocities and discrimination practices against Scheduled Castes. Discuss
56. The socio-cultural awakening in Indian society in the 19th century was a result of interaction with the West. In light of the above statement, discuss the trends that emerged in Indian socio-cultural discourse.

57. Instrumentalism may be good for making the policy acceptable to the society but will not be a futuristic option. Comment.
58. Suggest steps to prepare a good citizen charter.
59. Supremacy of the Prime Minister's Office is not good for Indian democracy. Comment.
60. Suggest measures to control different forms of sexual assault.
61. Since 2017, there have been at least 25 hunger deaths that can be traced to Aadhaar-related disruption in rations and pensions. In light of the above statement, critically analyse the significance of Aadhaar.
62. Discuss the challenges to internal security in India.
63. India can take a leaf out of the Chinese model of diplomacy rather than following western model of medaling with Internal Politics. Critically Analyze
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