

08 March 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Names for Lok Pal shortlisted, SC told

Context

- Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal informed the Supreme Court that names for Lokpal, the anti-corruption ombudsman, have been shortlisted and forwarded to the Selection Committee chaired by the Prime Minister.
- A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi asked Mr. Venugopal to enquire within 10 days about the probable date by which the Selection Committee would meet to finalise the appointment of the first Lokpal Chairperson and members.

Details of the issue

- Venugopal said there were 10 names shortlisted for Lokpal Chairperson and five names each for judicial and non-judicial members.
- The court refused a plea by petitioner NGO Common Cause, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, to put the shortlisted names in the public domain for the sake of transparency. Chief Justice Gogoi observed that there was no provision in the Lokpal Act to gather public opinion on shortlisted names.
- The court, however, did not dispose of the case despite the AG's submission that nothing remained in the matter. The Bench decided to keep the case on stand-by and wait for Mr. Venugopal's response on the date of meeting of the Selection Committee.
- Venugopal said the Selection Committee comprised high-ranking authorities and it would take some time to fix a date for all of them to sit together.
- Under Section 4 (1) of the Lokpal Act, the Selection Committee consists of the Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, Leader of the Opposition (LoP), the Chief Justice of India or a Supreme Court judge nominated by him and an eminent jurist.
- Venugopal said in the absence of an LoP, the leader of the single largest party in Opposition in the 16th Lok Sabha would be a 'special invitee'. The AG pointed out that appointment of Lokpal Chairperson or members would not become invalid "merely by reason of any vacancy in the Selection Committee."

Background

- Though passed in 2014, the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of 2013 was not implemented all these years because there was no Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the 16th Lok Sabha.
- The 2013 statute includes the LoP as a member of the selection committee. The Act intends the LoP to be part of the selection committee of the PM, the CJI and the Speaker, which has to first appoint an eminent jurist among their ranks.
- On July 24 last year, the Supreme Court had said the government's stand on completing the appointment of Lokpal, an ombudsman to protect the common man from corruption in public service and power centres, was "wholly unsatisfactory."
- The NGO had filed a contempt petition against the government for not appointing Lokpal despite an April 2017 judgment by the Supreme Court, and said the court should now take over and appoint the Lokpal.
- The court has for the past several months been constantly urging the government to complete the Lokpal appointment.
- Recently the government informed the Supreme Court that a search committee had been constituted in September 2018 for zeroing in on eligible candidates for the Lokpal, and it will frame its own rules of functioning.
- The Supreme Court in January of this year gave the Lokpal search committee time till February-end to short-list a panel of names for chairperson and members of the Lokpal to be placed before the high-power selection committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- Advocate Prashant Bhushan, for petitioner NGO Common Cause, submitted that Section 4 of the Lokpal Act mandates the government to be transparent about the search and appointment process.

- The 'Lokpal' is the central governing body that has jurisdiction over all members of parliament and central government employees in case of corruption. Whereas, the 'Lokayukta' is similar to the Lokpal, but functions on a state level. Scope of the 'Lokpal' is based on a national government level basis and the scope of the 'Lokayukta' relied on a state level.
- The main function is to address complaints of corruption, to make inquiries, investigations, and to conduct trials for the case on respective state and central government with having responsibility to help in curbing the corruption in the central and state government.

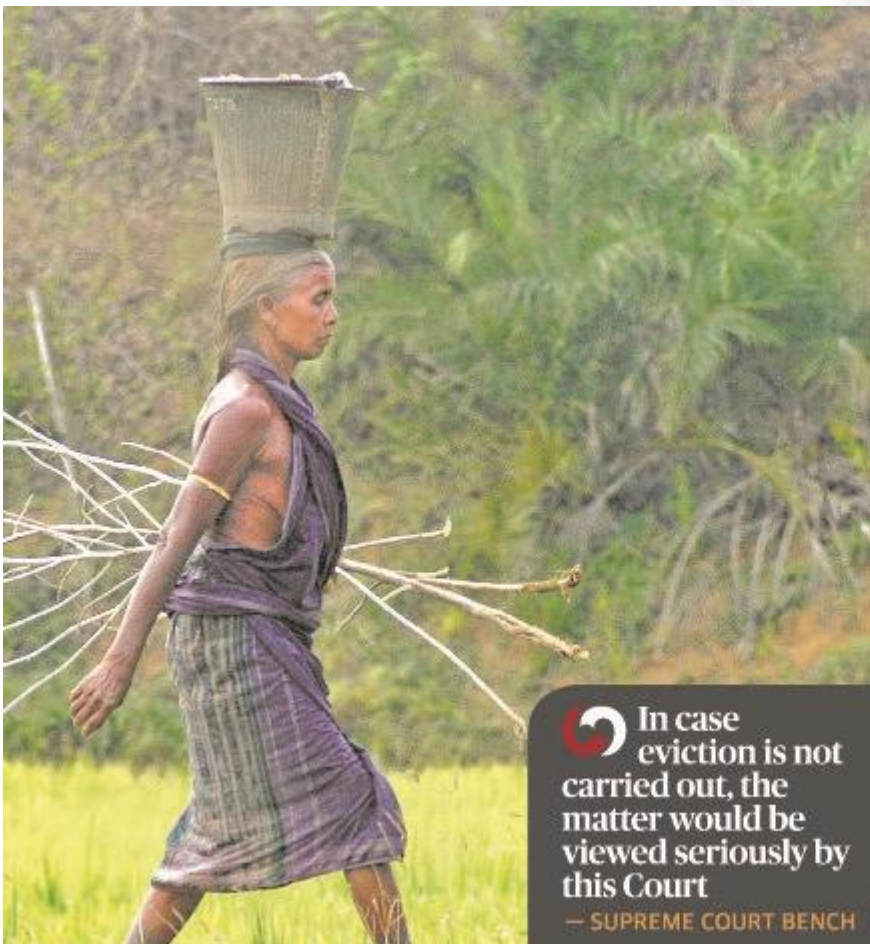
2. Odisha forest dwellers seek permanent relief under FRA

Context

- A large number of forest dwellers took to the streets in Bhubaneswar protesting against alleged tinkering with the Forest Rights Act.
- Although the Supreme Court had stayed its earlier order that had created panic among 10 lakh forest dwellers over possible eviction, protesters under the banner of Campaign for Survival and Dignity, Odisha, announced that they would continue to agitate till permanent relief was not granted.

What are the Supreme Court's directions?

- A three-judge Bench of Justices Arun Mishra, Navin Sinha and Indira Banerjee on February 13 had ordered the Chief Secretaries of many of these States to evict those whose claims as forest dwellers have been finally rejected under the law. The court directed that the eviction should be carried out on or before July 24, 2019, that is, the next date of hearing.



Talking tough

Some of the directions given by the Supreme Court to the Chief Secretaries of 21 States

1 Give a lowdown on how many claims of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) have been adjudicated under the Forest Rights Act, 2006

2 Give the status of eviction of people whose claims have been rejected under the Act

3 Explain in affidavits why even after attaining finality, eviction was not done

4 The Chief Secretaries should ensure that eviction of rejected claimants are carried out. They have to file compliance reports on or before July 24, 2019, which is the next date of hearing

In case eviction is not carried out, the matter would be viewed seriously by this Court
— SUPREME COURT BENCH

- The court ordered the Forest Survey of India (FSI) to make a satellite survey and place on record the "encroachment positions." It directed FSI to also place on record the position "after the eviction as far as possible."

Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006

- Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 deals with the rights of forest-dwelling communities over land and other resources. The Act grants legal recognition to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the forest laws.

Rights under the Act

- Title rights – Ownership to land that is being farmed by tribals or forest dwellers subject to a maximum of 4 hectares; ownership is only for land that is actually being cultivated by the concerned family, meaning that no new lands are granted.
- Use rights – to minor forest produce (also including ownership), to grazing areas, to pastoralist routes, etc.
- Relief and development rights – to rehabilitation in case of illegal eviction or forced displacement; and to basic amenities, subject to restrictions for forest protection.
- Forest management rights – to protect forests and wildlife.
- Eligibility – Eligibility to get rights under the Act is confined to those who “primarily reside in forests” and who depend on forests and forest land for a livelihood. Further, either the claimant must be a member of the Scheduled Tribes scheduled in that area or must have been residing in the forest for 75 years.

Process of recognition of rights

- The Act provides that the gram sabha, or village assembly, will initially pass a resolution recommending whose rights to which resources should be recognised.
- This resolution is then screened and approved at the level of the sub-division (or taluka) and subsequently at the district level.
- The screening committees consist of three government officials (Forest, Revenue and Tribal Welfare departments) and three elected members of the local body at that level. These committees also hear appeals.

C. GS3 Related

Nothing here today!!!

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The imperial cabinet and an acquiescent court (Supreme Court's decisions on Articles 110 (money bills) and 239AA (status of the federal unit of Delhi))

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts have pointed out that over a 6 months period, starting from September 2018, till the present, March 2019, the Honourable Supreme Court of India handed down four landmark judgments on fundamental rights.
- The landmark judgements include:
 1. Decriminalising same-sex relations;
 2. Decriminalising adultery,
 3. Opening up Sabarimala to women of all ages, and
 4. (partially) upholding Aadhaar.

The Political Storm post these judgements:

However, soon after these landmark decisions were taken, the Supreme Court was in the eye of a political storm.

Its Rafale and Central Bureau of Investigation judgments were subjected to intense scrutiny, and continue to be debated.

After the dust has settled, however, the most important legacy of the 2018-19 Supreme Court may lie elsewhere: in two decisions that have attracted less attention. These decisions are

1. The court's findings on the legal status of "money bills" (a part of its Aadhaar judgment), and
2. The court's judgment on the distribution of power between the Central government and the government of Delhi.

Experts have opined that these two decisions were about constitutional structure: about the balance of power between the different organs of the state, the federal character of the Republic, and fundamental questions of democratic accountability.

The guarantee of freedom:

- It is important to note that we are often tempted to think that our rights and freedoms depend upon the Constitution's fundamental rights chapter, and the judiciary's willingness to enforce it against the state.
- However, there are other important ways in which a Constitution guarantees freedom.
- A Constitution guarantees freedom by dividing and distributing political power between state organs in order to avoid concentration of authority, and to ensure that these different organs act as checks and balances upon each other.
- ***The surest dam against totalitarianism is to guarantee that no one stream of authority becomes powerful enough to sweep away everything else in the time of a flood.***

Perspective on Money bills:

- It is important to note that it is in cases involving constitutional structure that courts often exercise significant influence upon the future direction of the Republic. Further, it is in this context that we must examine the recent decisions on money bills and on federalism.
- ***Despite strong protests, the Aadhaar Act was passed as a money bill.***

The importance of bicameralism: Roles of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

- Experts opine that this development affected a crucial element of our constitutional structure:
- Bicameralism, in our parliamentary democracy, requires that a bill must be scrutinised and passed by both Houses of Parliament before it becomes law.
- The Lok Sabha represents the voice of the democratic majority.
- The Rajya Sabha represents the interests of the States, as well as perspectives free of immediate, electoral interests.
- The basic idea is that law-making is a balanced and deliberative process, not an exercise in pure majoritarianism.
- The crucial purpose of the Rajya Sabha is to act as a check and a balance upon the Lok Sabha, by scrutinising bills in a more deliberative and reflective manner, and raising concerns that may have been glossed over or evaded in the Lower House.
- The role of the Rajya Sabha becomes even more important when we consider a unique Indian innovation: ***anti-defection***.
- In the 1980s, it was decided that the only way to combat party defections was to disqualify members who voted against the whip, except under very tough conditions.
- This effectively meant the end of intra-party democracy: individual MPs could no longer vote according to their conscience, and had to follow the diktats of the cabinet.
- As a consequence, where there is a single-party majority in the Lok Sabha, the executive can effectively rule by decree, as it is in no threat of losing a vote if it fails to persuade its own party members.
- Further, with the Lower House no longer able to check the government, the only remaining legislative

forum that can then do so is the Rajya Sabha.

- **A money bill, however, takes the Rajya Sabha out of the equation: it only needs Lok Sabha approval.**
- As a matter of fact, some experts have opined that in combination with the anti-defection law, this places absolute power in the hands of the executive, and skews the democratic process.
- **Hence, its use must be restricted to the most limited of circumstances.**

The Arguments made in the Aadhar Case:

- This was what was argued in the Aadhaar case: that the terms of the Constitution (Article 110) mandated that money bills be narrowly limited to those that fell exclusively within the categories set out in Article 110.
- The Aadhaar Act, which established a biometric database and set up an authority (the UIDAI) to administer it, could not in any sense be called a “money bill” simply because the funds for the Authority came from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- The majority judgment in the Aadhaar case, however, allowed the Act to stand as a money bill (after taking out a provision allowing private party use), and thus, effectively, gutted the Rajya Sabha’s role in the democratic process.
- Some critics opine that after the court’s judgment, **governments wanting to bypass Rajya Sabha scrutiny on a range of important issues can simply insert a provision specifying that money for a project is to come from the Consolidated Fund.**

Perspective on Federalism:

- Meanwhile, the court was also considering another issue of democratic structure: **the dispute between the central government (acting through the Lt Governor) and the government of Delhi.**
- As a matter of fact, this dispute effectively turned upon the text of **Article 239AA of the Constitution**, a somewhat ambiguously drafted provision establishing Delhi as a hybrid federal entity — somewhere between a State and a Union Territory.
- In July 2018, while considering the overall constitutional position, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court made it clear that, wherever the constitutional text was capable of more than one interpretation, the court would favour a reading that increased democratic accountability: that is, in case of doubt, power would lie with the government that had been directly elected by the people (in this case, the Delhi government).
- However, critics point out that when it came to applying this principle to the specific disputes between the two entities, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court seemed to abandon this fundamental democratic principle.
- Critics further point out that the February 2019 judgment bears very little evidence of democratic concerns: **the heart of the dispute was about control over the civil services, which directly impacted day-to-day governance.**
- While the constitutional provisions themselves were ambiguous, one judge held that the Delhi government had no control over civil servants above a certain rank, while another judge held that the Delhi government had no control over civil servants at all.

Concluding Remarks: Fear of an imperial executive

- In 1973, the American historian Arthur M. Schlesinger coined the term “Imperial Presidency”, to characterise the increasing concentration of power in the office of the President, at the cost of other democratic institutions (such as the U.S. Congress and the Senate).
- Over the last few decades, many scholars have noticed this drift towards the increased powers of the political executive, across liberal democracies.
- **Some experts opine that the Supreme Court’s decisions on Articles 110 (money bills) and 239AA (status of the federal unit of Delhi) have concentrated greater power in the hands of the executive.**
- Critics point out that by privileging the centralising tendencies of the Constitution over its federalising ones, the court has squandered the chance to develop a strong jurisprudence on the federal structure, that could have been of use in future disputes between the Central government and various federal

2. Probing the press

Larger Background:

A Brief Look at the History of the Official Secrets Act:

- The Official Secrets Act, OSA in short, has its roots in the British colonial era. Its predecessor law, The Indian Official Secrets Act, 1904 was enacted during the time of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905.
- It was an amended and more stringent version of The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act XIV) of 1889, brought in at a time when a large number of powerful newspapers had emerged in several languages across India.
- Fearless editors opposed the Raj's policies on a daily basis, building political consciousness among the people, and facing police crackdowns and prison terms to uphold their mission and convictions. One of the main purposes of the Act was to muzzle the voice of nationalist publications.
- In April 1923, a newer version of the Official Secrets Act was notified. The Indian Official Secrets Act (Act No XIX of 1923) replaced the earlier Act, and was extended to all matters of secrecy and confidentiality in governance in the country.

The Act's Ambit: A Perspective

- The secrecy law broadly deals with two aspects — spying or espionage, which is dealt with in Section 3 of the Act, and disclosure of other secret information of the government, which is dealt with in Section 5. The secret information can be any official code, password, sketch, plan, model, article, note, document or information. Since the classification of secret information is so broad, it is argued that the colonial law is in direct conflict with the Right to Information Act.
- Under Section 5, both the person communicating the information, and the person receiving the information, can be punished by the prosecuting agency.

Recent use of the Act:

- The most recent conviction under the Act came in 2018, when a Delhi court held former diplomat Madhuri Gupta, who had served at the Indian High Commission in Islamabad, guilty under the OSA.
- She was sentenced to three years in jail for passing on sensitive information to Pakistan's ISI.
- In another high-profile case, then Kashmir Times journalist Iftikhar Gilani was arrested in June 2002 and charged under the OSA for allegedly possessing secret documents relating to the deployment of troops in the Valley. The state later withdrew the case.

View of the 2nd ARC on the Official Secrets Act:

- The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), in its Report of June 2006, had, inter-alia, recommended that the Official Secrets Act (OSA), 1923 should be repealed, and substituted by a chapter in the National Security Act, containing provisions relating to official secrets.
- The ARC had made this recommendation ostensibly on the ground that the Law Commission had recommended in 1971 that an 'umbrella Act' should be passed to bring together all Acts/Laws relating to national security.
- However, in 1980, the National Security Act (NSA) was enacted only to provide for preventive powers to deal with likely threats to maintenance of public order and security of the country etc., besides maintenance of essential services.
- In such a situation, the Government decided not to repeal the OSA as the other enactments relating to national security such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, Chapters 6 and 7 of the Indian Penal Code etc. have also not been merged in the NSA.

Why in the news?

- Recently, the Government of India told the Supreme Court that documents related to the Rafale jet deal have been stolen from the Defence Ministry.
- Further, the government also warned that those relying on "secret documents", were violating the Official

Secrets Act, for which the punishment is jail or fine.

- It is important to note that former Union ministers Yashwant Sinha and Arun Shourie and lawyer Prashant Bhushan have jointly filed a petition alleging that the Centre suppressed crucial facts in their submissions to the court.
- On February 8, a report in The Hindu, citing a “Defence Ministry note” of November 2015, stated that the Ministry “raised strong objections to ‘parallel negotiations’ conducted by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) with the French side” in the Rafale deal.

Editorial Analysis:

- Critics opine that the essential distinction between public interest and the interest of the government of the day seems to have been lost.
- The documentary evidence published so far indicates that “parallel parleys” held at the behest of the Prime Minister’s Office undermined the Indian Negotiating Team’s discussions with the French side; that internal questions had been raised about the absence of bank guarantees to hedge against possible default by the vendor; and that this had an adverse effect on the pricing of the 36 jets to be bought in fly-away condition.
- Some experts take the view that few can doubt that these revelations advance the public interest, and have no impact on national security.
- It is important to note that ***the publication of the documents and news reports based on them constitute the legitimate exercise of the freedom of the press.***
- The threat of a criminal investigation under the Official Secrets Act, 1923 (OSA) is disappointing.
- Some experts opine that the government is also on weak legal ground when it claims the court should not rely on “stolen” documents while hearing petitions seeking a review of its judgment declining a probe into the Rafale deal.
- ***As the Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, pointed out, the manner in which a document has been procured is immaterial, if it is relevant to an adjudication.***
- As one of the judges asked, can the government seek shelter behind the notion of national security if a corrupt practice had indeed taken place?

A Look at Specifics:

- It is to the credit of successive governments that the OSA has rarely been used against the press.
- The law primarily targets officials entrusted with secret documents, codes and other material, but Section 5 criminalises voluntarily receiving and possessing such documents, if given to them in contravention of the Act.
- In a limited examination of this section, the Law Commission observed in a 1971 report that its wording was quite wide. However, it left it to the government to decide against prosecution, if the information leak did not materially affect the state’s interest.
- There is undoubtedly a case for distinguishing between an act that helps the enemy or affects national security, and one that advances legitimate public interest.
- Further, in times when information freedom is seen as salutary for democracy, laws such as the OSA should yield to the moral imperative behind the Right to Information Act.
- This reasoning is embedded in Section 8(2) of the RTI Act, which says that notwithstanding the provisions of the OSA, “a public authority may allow access to information, if public interest in disclosure outweighs the harm to the protected interests.”

Concluding Remarks:

- The government should refrain from using its secrecy laws to contend with embarrassing media revelations. It would do well instead to respond responsibly to questions thrown up by the revelations.

Category: SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. Women and the workplace

Editorial Analysis:

- For more than a century, March 8 has marked International Women's Day.
- International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the achievements of women and promoting gender equality worldwide. But as we pause to celebrate our many advances, we must also acknowledge how much remains to be done.

Interlinked issues: A Perspective

- Two interconnected issues have emerged as priorities over the past two years. These issues are:
 1. Sexual harassment at the workplace and
 2. Obstacles to women's participation at all levels of the workforce, including political representation.

Fallout of the #MeToo movement:

- The 2017-18 explosion of the #MeToo movement across social media uncovered countless cases of unreported sexual harassment and assault, first in the U.S. and then in India.
- In both countries, it led to the resignations or firing of dozens of prominent men, mostly politicians, actors and journalists.
- It also prompted a range of public and private organisations to examine the internal institutional cultures surrounding sexual harassment, gender parity, and gender equity. Amongst them, the United Nations.

Measures Taken Up by the United Nations:

- It is important to note that UN Secretary-General António Guterres has been a staunch supporter of women's rights since his election in 2016, stating the need for "benchmarks and time frames to achieve [gender] parity across the system, well before the target year of 2030".
- In September 2017, the UN released a System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity to transform the UN's representation of women at senior levels.
- Currently, the UN's Senior Management Group, which has 44 top UN employees, comprises 23 women and 21 men.
- Further, in response to the MeToo movement, the UN recently conducted a system-wide survey to gauge the prevalence of sexual harassment among its more than 200,000 global staff.
- Though only 17% of UN staff responded, what the survey uncovered was sobering.
- One in three UN women workers reported being sexually harassed in the past two years, predominantly by men.
- Clearly, the UN gender strategy has much to improve, but then the UN, like most other international and national organisations, has a decades-old cultural backlog to tackle.
- The inter-governmental UN is as affected by prevalent national cultures as are individual countries. Some might argue more, since the UN Secretary-General has to find a way through contending blocs of countries that support or oppose women's rights' goals. This is where UN research plays a significant role.
- As findings on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) indicate, many countries, including India, were able to substantially increase their performance on issues such as sex ratios and maternal mortality once their leaders had signed on to the MDGs. Tracking performance on the Sustainable Development Goals, a more comprehensive iteration of the MDGs, will again provide useful pointers for policymakers and advocates going forward.
- At the same time, Mr. Guterres is to be commended for holding a mirror to organisational practices when it comes to sexual harassment or gender parity. Bringing the issue of gender inside the organisation, to reform its practices, will enable the UN to stand as an example of the rights it advocates.
- An important question arises: **How can organisations as large as the UN improve their internal cultures surrounding sexual harassment, gender parity, and gender equity?**
- This issue has generated considerable debate in India, where political parties have begun to ask how they are to apply the rules of the **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013** which lays down that every office in the country must have an

internal complaints committee to investigate allegations of sexual harassment.

- With thousands of offices across the country, and barely any employee trained to handle sexual harassment, Indian political parties ask whether broader structures, such as district or regional complaints committees, could play the role of office ones.
- In this context, does the UN Secretariat's single window structure for such complaints provide a better practice? One caveat is that it does not apply across the organisation, so UN agencies, including the multi-institute UN University that aims to achieve gender parity at the director level by end 2019, still have to identify their organisation-specific mechanisms.
- Experts point out that we need further research before we can arrive at a judgment: ***perhaps a follow-up to the UN's sexual harassment survey that looks at complaints received and action taken.***
- In India, going by past figures, the impact of the 2013 Act, one of the most comprehensive in the world, has been poor.
- Despite a large jump in complaints recorded, convictions have not shown a proportionate rise, largely due to poor police work.
- That is an obstacle which the UN, with its internal mechanisms, may not suffer from as far as first responses are concerned, but will certainly face as and when cases come to law.

Concluding Remarks:

- Both the UN's early successes and the Indian experience offer lessons to UN member-states, few of which have gender parity or serious action against sexual harassment in the workplace.
- In the U.S., companies such as General Electric, Accenture, Pinterest, Twitter, General Mills and Unilever are setting and achieving targets to increase female representation at all levels of their workforce.
- It is hoped that this March 8, 2019, companies worldwide pledge to follow the examples in the U.S.
- And that other institutions, whether universities or political parties, follow the UN example.
- ***Gender reforms begin at home, not only in the family but also in the workplace.***

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Breathing clean

Larger Background:

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

- Air pollution is one of the biggest global environmental challenges of today.
- A time bound national level strategy for pan India implementation to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner in the form of National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) was launched by Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan in the month of January, 2019.
- Overall objective of the NCAP is comprehensive mitigation actions for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution besides augmenting the air quality monitoring network across the country and strengthening the awareness and capacity building activities.
- Today cities occupy just 3% of the land, but contribute to 82% of GDP and responsible for 78% of Carbon dioxide emissions; cities though are engines of growth and equity but they have to be sustainable and it is in this context that NCAP being a very inclusive program holds special relevance.
- The NCAP will be a mid-term, five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year. However, the international experiences and national studies indicate that significant outcome in terms of air pollution initiatives are visible only in the long-term, and hence the programme may be further extended to a longer time horizon after a mid-term review of the outcomes.
- The approach for NCAP includes collaborative, multi-scale and cross-sectoral coordination between the relevant central ministries, state governments and local bodies.
- Dovetailing of the existing policies and programmes including the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and other initiatives of Government of India in reference to climate change will be

SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting):

- This is a state-of-art Air Quality and Weather Forecast System.
- This system, first of its kind in the country, was developed indigenously in record time by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune and operationalized by India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- SAFAR will accelerate public awareness and preparedness of air pollution and weather extremes. It will also lead to better understanding of linkages among emissions, weather, pollution and climate.
- It will monitor all weather parameters like temperature, rainfall, humidity, wind speed and wind direction.
- In addition to regular air quality parameters like PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, Sulfur Dioxide, Ozone, Nitrogen Oxides, Carbon Monoxide, the system will also monitor the existence of Benzene, Toluene and Xylene.
- Besides health, SAFAR system would benefit cost savings to several other sectors like agriculture, aviation, infrastructure, disaster management skill, tourism and many others, which directly or indirectly get affected by air quality and weather.

National Air Quality Index (AQI) :

- The AQI has six categories of air quality, viz Good, Satisfactory, Moderately polluted, Poor, Very Poor and Severe with distinct colour scheme.
- Each of these categories is associated with likely health impacts.
- AQI considers eight pollutants (PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, NO₂, SO₂, CO, O₃, NH₃ and Pb) for which short-term (upto 24-hourly averaging period) National Ambient Air Quality Standards are prescribed.
- Presently, air quality data for 10 cities are connected to AQI system which is available on the website of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Central Pollution Control Board.

Editorial Analysis:

- An assessment of the quality of air across countries and in cities has come as a fresh warning to India on the levels of deadly pollutants its citizens are breathing.
- The ***IQ AirVisual 2018 World Air Quality Report*** published in collaboration with Greenpeace underscores that Delhi remains an extremely hazardous city to live in.
- The national capital exposes people to air containing annual average fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) of 113.5 micrograms per cubic metre, when it should be no more than 10 micrograms as per WHO guidelines.
- As a matter of fact, Gurugram, which borders Delhi, fares even worse with a PM_{2.5} level of 135.8 micrograms, while 15 of the 20 cities worldwide ranked the worst on air pollution metrics are in India.
- Delhi's air quality has been making headlines for years now.
- However, measures to mitigate emissions have not moved into crisis mode: the launch this year of the ***National Clean Air Programme*** for 102 cities and towns, including the capital, talks only of long-term benefits of mitigation programmes beyond 2024, and not a dramatic reduction in near-term pollution.
- This has to change, and an annual target for reduction be set to make governments accountable.
- ***Achieving a reduction within a short window is not impossible if there is the political will to reform key sectors: transport, biomass and construction.***

A Look at Some Specifics:

- The monitoring of air quality in real time across cities and towns in India is far from adequate or uniform.
- The evidence from Delhi, which is relatively more robust, has clear pointers to what needs to be done.
- The Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises learnt from a commissioned study in the year 2018 that dusty sources such as roads, construction sites and bare soil added about 42% of the coarse particulate matter (PM₁₀) in summer, while in winter it was a significant 31%.
- Similarly, PM₁₀ from transport varied between 15% and 18% across seasons.
- Yet, it is the even more unhealthy PM_{2.5} penetrating the lungs that causes greater worry.
- Vehicles contributed 18-23% of these particulates, while biomass burning was estimated to make up 15-

22%, and dusty sources 34% during summer. These insights provide a road map for action.

Concluding Remarks: The Way Forward

- The Delhi government has done well to decide on inducting 1,000 electric buses, should speed up the plan and turn its entire fleet green.
- A transition to electric vehicles for all commercial applications, with funding from the Centre's programme for adoption of EVs, should be a priority in cities.
- Cutting nitrogen and sulphur emissions from industrial processes needs a time-bound programme supervised by the Environment Ministry.
- These are priority measures to get urban India out of the red zone

F. Tidbits

1. Zuckerberg promises a privacy-friendly Facebook

- Facebook, which grew into a colossus by vacuuming up information in every possible way and using it to target ads at users, now says its future lies in privacy-oriented messaging.
- Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO, announced the shift in a blog post apparently intended to blunt both criticism of the company's data handling and potential antitrust action.
- He said that the company would prioritise giving people ways to communicate in a truly private fashion, with their intimate thoughts and pictures shielded by encryption in ways that Facebook itself can't read.
- But Mr. Zuckerberg didn't suggest any changes to Facebook's core newsfeed-and-groups-based service, or to Instagram's social network, currently the fastest growing part of the company.
- Critics aren't convinced Mr. Zuckerberg is committed to meaningful change.
- Facebook has suffered privacy lapses that have amplified the calls for regulations that would hold companies more accountable when they improperly expose their users' information.
- As part of his effort to make amends, Mr. Zuckerberg plans to stitch together its Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram messaging services so users will be able to contact each other across all of the apps.
- Meanwhile, Facebook and the Instagram photo app would still operate more like a town square where people can openly share whatever they want.
- Critics have raised another possible motive the threat of antitrust crackdowns. Integration could make it much more difficult, if not impossible, to later separate and spin off Instagram and WhatsApp as separate companies.
- Combining the three services also lets Facebook build more complete data profiles on all of its users.

2. Teachers entitled to gratuity, rules SC

- The Supreme Court has altered its judgment and said teachers were entitled to claim gratuity under the Payment of Gratuity Act.
- In a rare move, the court recently called back its own judgment suo motu and listed it for fresh hearing. The court had frozen the implementation of the court's January 7 verdict which erroneously held that a teacher is not an 'employee' under the Payment of Gratuity Act.
- The January 7 judgment, which was re-called, was delivered by a Bench of Justices A.M. Sapre and Indu Malhotra after relying on a 2005 judgment of the Supreme Court.
- The Bench of Justices Sapre and Malhotra was not apprised of the later development of Parliament amending the law in 2009 to effectively include teachers within the ambit of 'employee' under the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972.
- The amendment had a retrospective effect dating back to 1997. Subsequent High Court judgments had also interpreted the 2009 amendment to include teachers within the definition of 'employee' under Section 2(e) of the Act irrespective of the institution in which they work.

3. Ordinance on university faculty reservations gets nod

- The Union Cabinet has approved an ordinance to return faculty reservations in higher education institutions to the earlier "200-point roster system", whereby the University or college as a whole is considered as a unit, rather than each department.

- A number of teachers and student unions, Dalit and Adivasi rights groups and political parties — including the National Democratic Alliance's own Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) — have been agitating for such a decision for over a year, arguing that the 13-point roster system, which considered each department as a separate unit, effectively phased out reserved positions, especially in smaller departments.
- The Cabinet approved the ordinance in what is likely to be its last meeting before the announcement of Lok Sabha elections.
- "This decision will address the long-standing demands of persons belonging to SCs/STs/SEBCs [Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/Socially and Educationally Backward Classes] and ensure their rights envisaged under the Constitution," said Human Resources Development Minister Prakash Javadekar in a tweet on Thursday.

4. Diseases of affluence

- This refers to diseases that are increasingly common among the populations of the various developed countries of the world.
- Obesity, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and coronary heart disease are considered to be the most common examples of such diseases.
- They are seen as the outcome of improving living standards in the Western world that have led to a significant increase in the lifespan of people but also led to drastic changes in their daily lifestyle.
- Diseases of affluence are in contrast to diseases of poverty that are the result of low living standards that prevent people from having sufficient access to quality healthcare.

5. India, Russia sign deal on nuclear submarine

- India has sealed a \$3-billion deal with Russia for leasing a nuclear-powered attack submarine for the Indian Navy for a period of 10 years, military sources said.
- The two countries signed an inter-governmental agreement capping months of negotiations on price and other aspects of the deal.
- Under the pact, Russia will have to deliver the Akula class submarine, to be known as Chakra III, to the Indian Navy by 2025. It will be the third Russian submarine to be leased to the Navy.
- India has been significantly bolstering its naval prowess in the backdrop of China's attempts to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean region.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Funding period extended to boost regional air connectivity

Context

- The Union Cabinet gave its approval for extending the "time and scope" of financial support of ₹4,500 crore to the Airports Authority of India (AAI) for the revival of small airports for the regional connectivity scheme (RCS).
- The sum of ₹4,500 crore had earlier been promised for the development of 50 un-served and under-served airports for the period of three years between financial years 2018 and 2020. An AAI official said that this was now being extended to all the airports AAI may develop until 2022.
- The official added that the need to seek these extensions was felt because the duration of the RCS programme according to the scheme document is 10 years. The scheme was launched in March 2017 after the first set of RCS routes were awarded.
- The AAI has developed 38 unfrequented and less frequented airports since the launch of the scheme in March 2017. As many as 750 routes have been awarded for connecting 77 un-served airports, 21 under-served airports, ten waterdromes and 31 helipads.

About UDAN

- The scheme UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik) envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports. The scheme would be in operation for a period of 10 years.

- The UDAN scheme will be applicable on flights which cover between 200 km and 800 km with no lower limit set for hilly, remote, islands and regions which are security sensitive.
- Under the UDAN scheme, the flights are bound to connect at least one RCS airport (underserved and unserved airports).
- The RCS caps fares and also offers a ceiling for the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) available for each route. Which means the airlines cannot charge beyond the caps specified from passengers.
- For the shortest route under the scheme fare has been capped at Rs 1,420. For longest route, fare has been capped at Rs 3,500.
- The Centre has also decided to provide concessions such as 2% excise on Value Added Tax (VAT) and service tax at 1/10th.
- State government are bound to provide free security and fire service, utilities at concessional rates and reduce VAT on ATF to 1%.
- There will be no landing charges, parking charges and Terminal Navigation Landing Charges will be imposed for RCS flights.

2. Soumya Swaminathan is WHO chief scientist

Context

- As part of the reforms at the World Health Organisation (WHO), Soumya Swaminathan has been moved from the position of Deputy Director-General to chief scientist heading the division created to strengthen the organisation's core scientific work and ensure the quality and consistency of its norms and standards.
- Previously, she was one of the three Deputy Director-Generals supporting the Director-General in overseeing all programmes. She was the first Indian to hold the post.

World Health Organization

- WHO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that is concerned with international public health
- It was established on 7 April 1948, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. The WHO is a member of the United Nations Development Group. Its predecessor, the Health Organisation, was an agency of the League of Nations.
- The constitution of the World Health Organization had been signed by 61 countries on 22 July 1946, with the first meeting of the World Health Assembly finishing on 22 July 1946.
- It incorporated the Office International d'Hygiène Publique and the League of Nations Health Organization.
- Since its establishment, it has played a leading role in the eradication of smallpox. Its current priorities include communicable diseases, in particular HIV/AIDS, Ebola, malaria and tuberculosis; the mitigation of the effects of non-communicable diseases such as sexual and reproductive health, development, and aging; nutrition, food security and healthy eating; occupational health; substance abuse; and driving the development of reporting, publications, and networking.
- The WHO is responsible for the World Health Report, the worldwide World Health Survey, and World Health Day.
- The current Director-General of the WHO is Tedros Adhanom, who started his five-year term on 1 July 2017

3. International Women's Day

- International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated on March 8 every year. It is a focal point in the movement for women's rights. It is a day of celebration of the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.
- In 1917, a mass agitation "For Bread and Peace" in Russia led to the abdication of Czar Nicholas II and also granted women the right to vote.
- After women gained suffrage in Soviet Russia in 1917, March 8 became a national holiday there. The day was then predominantly celebrated by the socialist movement and communist countries until it was adopted in 1975 by the United Nations.
- Today, International Women's Day is a public holiday in some countries and largely ignored elsewhere.

In some places, it is a day of protest; in others, it is a day that celebrates womanhood.

- The United Nations adopted the International Women's Day in 1975. Every year, an official theme is adopted to celebrate the IWD. This year's theme of the International Women's Day is "Balance for Better", which advocates the need of a gender-balanced society.
- Historically, purple, green and white are colours associated with IWD. Purple signifies justice and dignity. Green symbolises hope. White represents purity. (However, white has become obsolete as associating "purity" with women is a controversial concept)
- "Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change," read this year's statement of UN.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1. Consider the following statements with respect to 'Rastriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram Scheme'?

1. It aims to develop the personality and leadership qualities of the youth and to engage them in nation building activities.

2. It is a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports

Select the correct statements-

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) None of the above

Answer: **(c)**

Explanation:

The Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram Scheme is an ongoing Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports and has been continuing since 12th Five Year Plan. The Scheme aims to develop the personality and leadership qualities of the youth and to engage them in nation building activities.

Question 2. '70 point Performance Grading Index (PGI)' is associated with

- (a) MSMEs
- (b) Education
- (c) Adolescent Health
- (d) Total Fertility Rate

Answer: **(b)**

Explanation:

The government will use a 70 point Performance Grading Index (PGI) to assess areas of deficiency in each state's school education system.

Question 3. 'Bhavishya Portal' is associated with:

- (a) Pensions
- (b) MSMEs
- (c) Education Loans
- (d) Skill Development

Answer: **(a)**

Explanation:

It is an online Pension Sanction and Payment Tracking System implemented by the Department of Pension & Pensioners Welfare, Government of India. The system provides for on-line tracking of pension sanction and

Question 4. Consider the following statements with respect to 'Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSSs)'

1. It provides vocational training to non-literate, neo-literate, as well as school drop outs by identifying skills as would have a market in the region of their establishment.
 2. Government of India funds each JSS with 40 lakhs annually
- Select the correct statements
- (a) Only 1
 - (b) Only 2
 - (c) Both 1 and 2
 - (d) None of the above

Answer: **(a)**

Explanation:

Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSSs) are established to provide vocational training to non-literate, neo-literate, as well as school drop outs by identifying skills as would have a market in the region of their establishment. Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSSs), have been categorized into three categories, namely, Category 'A', Category 'B' and Category 'C'. Different quantum of assistance has been provided for each category.

Question 5. 'Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)' is associated with-

- (a) Tuberculosis
- (b) Kala Azhar
- (c) Malaria and Dengue
- (d) Typhoid

Answer: **(a)**

Explanation:

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) has launched the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme for nutritional support to tuberculosis patients as Nikshay Poshan Yojana(NPY). Under it, a financial incentive of Rs 500 per month is provided to each notified TB patient for the entire duration of his treatment.

I. UPSC Mains practice Questions

1. The country's cities are among the world's most insufferable. With so little being done to address the present danger of pollution, the economy might eventually suffer too. Examine the statement. (12.5 Marks; 200 words)
2. Every death sentence throws up a moral dilemma on whether the truth has been sufficiently established or not. The only way out of this is the abolition of the death penalty altogether. Discuss (12.5 Marks; 200 words)