

Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

Cold-Blooded Genocide



Sexual Harassment
Allegations
against CJI

Violation of Natural
Justice and Appointment
of in house panel .

RBI's
February
12 circular

Supreme Court
strikes down RBI's Feb 2018
order on stressed assets

India may stop
oil imports
from Iran

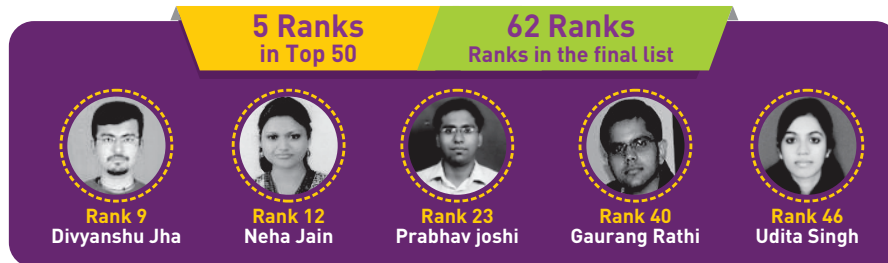
India's
energy deficiency
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Cross-LoC
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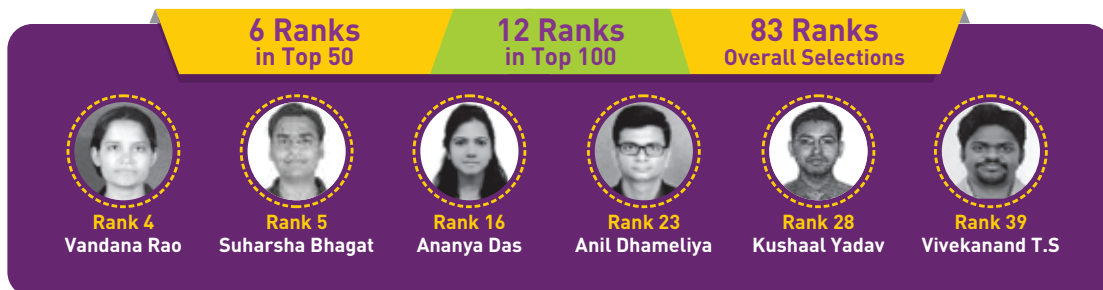
A question
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RESULTS

Incredible results in IAS 2013



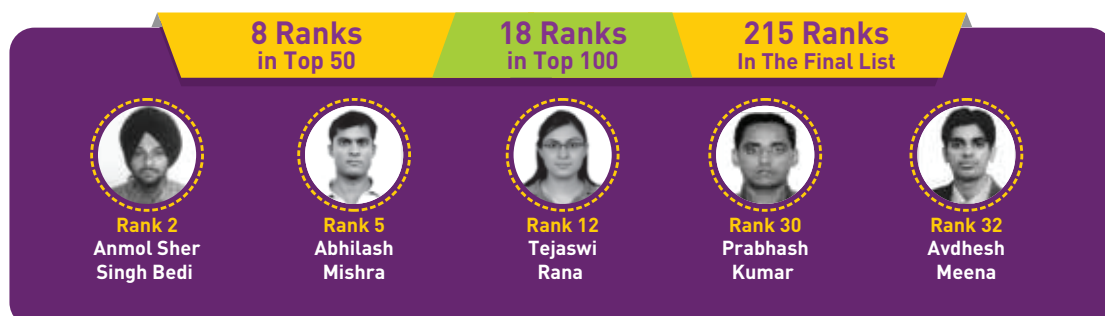
We broke our past record in IAS 2014



We did it again in IAS 2015



And we've done it yet again in IAS 2016



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



Archi 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

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POLITY

1. Bilkis Bano Case

Context:

- The Supreme Court has directed the Gujarat government to give Rs 50 lakh compensation to Bilkis Bano, who was gangraped during the 2002 riots.
- In addition, the apex court has asked the state government to provide her government job and government accommodation.

Compensation to the victim

- It is a relatively less recognised component of criminal justice. In a system that focusses mainly on the accused, an order of compensation is a recognition of the state's obligation to victims of crime, especially horrific acts.
- The Supreme Court has endeavored to achieve restitutive justice.
 - * Restitutive justice: "Restitution refers to monies or services paid by the offender/Institution to the victim, whether directly to the victim or through intermediaries such as insurance companies
- While convictions are not easy to come by in cases of mob violence, victim compensation may often be the only way to ensure some justice.

Laws that permit for disbursal of funds

- The Code of Criminal Procedure was amended in 2008 to insert Section 357A under which every State government has to prepare a scheme to set up a fund from which compensation can be paid to victims of crime and their dependents who have suffered loss and injury and who may require rehabilitation.
- The Centre has a Central Victim Compensation Fund.
- On Supreme Court directions, the National Legal Services Authority has prepared a compensation scheme for women victims and survivors of sexual assault and other crimes. Many States have notified schemes on these lines.

Way forward

- The Supreme Court order awarding compensation and rehabilitation to Bilkis Bano is certainly a step forward in strengthening the faith of the common citizen in the judicial process while fighting the failure of the state in ensuring protection of their guaranteed rights.
- While on paper there is a mechanism to assess rehabilitation needs and pay compensation, there is a need to streamline the schemes and ensure that the compensation process is not done in an ad hoc manner, but is based on sound principles.

2. Business and Politics

Introduction

- According to the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), 430 out of the 521 sitting MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha have assets worth more than ₹1 crore.
- In other words, 83% of our lawmakers are crorepatis. That makes them a rich people's club governing a largely poor country.

Before 1990's

- There was a time when members of most legacy business and industrial houses of the country stuck to their business of doing business and left politics to politicians.
- During the License Raj, politicians were content accepting donations from businessmen or seeking jobs for their kin.
- Given the heavily state controlled economy, Indian business could use politicians to get particularistic benefits: an import duty relaxation here, an industrial licence there. And politicians got access to a huge pool of funds.
- But business and politics never intersected with each other.

LPG Era and thereafter

- Liberalisation altered India's economic present and future. The new riche saw politics and political power as a means to first secure and then expand their business interests.
 - * Firms use political connections for favourable regulations, to cut red tape, or to access resources.
- It is a truism that business and politics share a symbiotic relationship. Today, they have almost become one, necessitating a new definition of businessman-politician or politician-businessman.
- The hyphenation is not semantic or syntactical, but reflects the emergence of a new class.

Conclusion

- As Walter Annenberg, American businessman and diplomat, posited, "The greatest power is not money power but political power." It suffices to say that the heady mix of economic and political power is even more intoxicating than either of its stand-alone constituents.

3. Constitutional Rights, Judicial Review and Parliamentary Democracy

Introduction

- In the 70th year of the Republic we find ourselves engaged in a heightened debate on the imperatives of preserving the constitutionally bound jurisdictional equilibrium/ separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the Indian state even as we celebrate the expansion of fundamental freedoms and the resilience of our democracy.
- It is about the reach of judicial review power exercised by the Supreme Court and the high courts, often extended through the agency of what is popularly known in India as Public Interest Litigation (PIL) or social action litigation.
- The excellent contribution of the Supreme Court is in asserting the inviolability of constitutional rights, particularly the right to dignity as the core constitutional value notwithstanding, but the rightful limits of judicial intervention in the executive and legislative domains need to be addressed.
- This article seeks to advance the debate on related jurisprudential issues in the larger framework of a functioning parliamentary democracy.

The original rationale and justification of PIL

It has emerged as a primary instrument in the expansion of judicial review is best summed up in the words of its principal and early propounders, Justices P N Bhagwati and V R Krishna Iyer, as:

- A strategic arm of the legal aid movement which is intended to bring justice within the reach of the poor masses, who constitute the low visibility area of humanity.
- PIL is brought before the Court not for the purpose of enforcing the right of one individual against another as happens in the case of ordinary litigation, but it is intended to promote and vindicate public interest, which demands that violation of constitutional or legal rights of a large number of people who are poor, ignorant or in a socially or economically disadvantaged position should not go unnoticed and unredressed.

Instrument of Judicial Review

- In *D C Wadhwa v State of Bihar* (1987), the Court, expounding the philosophy of limited government, declared that the exercise of executive power has to be within the parameters of constitutional restraint failing which any member of the public has sufficient interest in the subject matter to impugn the practice by means of a writ petition, which the Court is bound to entertain and adjudicate.

- Through an expansive interpretation of Article 21 of the Constitution in *Maneka Gandhi v Union of India* (1978), the Court held that the "procedure established by law" envisaged in the said article had to be just, reasonable and fair to pass the test of constitutionality. Most significantly, through a conjoint reading of Articles 14, 19 and 21, the Court read the right to life under Article 21 as a right to live with dignity.
- In *M Nagaraj v Union of India*, the Court declared profoundly that fundamental rights in Articles 14, 19 and 21 "stand at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of constitutional value" in a fulsome recognition that "human dignity, equality and freedom were conjoined, reciprocal and covalent values" (Liebenberg 2005).
- Earlier in *Board of Trustees of the Port of Bombay v Dilipkumar Raghvendra Nath Nadkarni*, the Court had reiterated that "life" in Article 21 must encompass "the graces of human civilization that makes life worth living."
- The Court's expanding human rights jurisprudence recognised as fundamental, the citizens' right to food, health, and education.
 - * Instances of the Court's intervention to expand the frontiers of these rights to include redressal for the killing of innocent people in false encounters and relief to the victims of custodial violence, etc, can be multiplied.
- In closing the cycle of expansive interpretation, the Court recognised the Directive Principles of State Policy as "the conscience of the Constitution" which give shape and meaning to fundamental rights. Imparting a dynamic dimension to the right to equality under Article 14, the Court has read the absence of arbitrariness as integral to the guarantee of equality and non-discrimination.

Constituent Power

- The courts entrenched an expansive approach in articulating constitutional philosophy, established the foundational principles for the exercise of its judicial review jurisdiction traceable to Articles 13, 32, 136, 142 and 147 of the Constitution. (The high court's judicial review jurisdiction is anchored in Article 226 of the Constitution.)
- It proceeded to hold that judicial review was a "constituent power," and an integral component of the unalterable basic structure of the Constitution.
- The seeds of transformational jurisprudence aimed at the empowerment of disadvantaged citizens and governance accountable to the discipline of the Constitution were thus sown.

Epistolary Jurisdiction

- A process where citizens may write letters to apex court which stand treated as writ petitions for the enforcement of fundamental rights)

Judiciary entering the domains of Executive and legislature

- Moving beyond ensuring basic rights for citizens, the Court decisively extended its review jurisdiction to what are ex facie functions assigned originally and exclusively to the Executive Branch under the constitutional scheme.
 - * Petitions to the Court have invoked judicial review in “public interest” to question major policy decisions of the government concerning policy choices, for example, in what are now known as the 2G spectrum and coal mines allocation cases.
- Challenge to proceedings of legislative assemblies and decisions of the speaker have also been entertained by the Court.
 - * Decisions of the Court voiding a constitutional amendment approved by Parliament to alter the procedure for appointment of judges,
 - * Exercising Review Powers in what is popularly known as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) case following the constitution bench decision in the Naga People’s Movement of Human Rights v Union of India (1982)²⁰ — to hold that the use of excessive force by the Manipur police or the armed forces of the union was not permissible and that a writ petition under Article 32 of the Constitution against such impermissible use of force was admissible—has extended the Courts’ review jurisdiction to cover not only administrative decisions but to domains hitherto regarded as the exclusive preserve of legislatures.
 - * The long arm of judicial power has been extended to advising Parliament to “create a separate offence for lynching and provide adequate punishment for the same”
 - * to “frame a law for disqualification of political candidates facing criminal charges to cure the malignancy;”
 - * “To bring about a law to regulate street hawkers,”
 - * “To bring law appositely to cover the field of honour killing.”
- Relaxed rules of locus standi, enabling a “public-spirited citizen” to knock at the doors of superior judiciary for redressal of a public wrong and vindication of a public duty by addressing the Court even through a letter/postcard, has created what is known as the “epistolary” jurisdiction which has extended the Court’s access to virtually every citizen who can show an infraction of a constitutional right as articulated in the Court’s pronouncements.

These cases are illustrative of the Court’s activist role located in the “living tree” constitutionalism

Concerns due to Expansive Judicial Review

- Protagonists of a wide judicial review jurisdiction argue that it subserves the rule of law
- They reject it as being anti-majoritarian or anti-democratic by locating its sanction in the Constitution itself—the social contract that reflects the will of the people.
- It has also been suggested that the separation of legislative and judicial space is premised that the legislature “is responsive to the popular will, [is] attuned to constitutional values and has greater capacity than the judiciary”
- The contrarians persist with a view in favour of restraint, arguing that in a democracy, people exercise their sovereignty through elected representatives and not through the unelected judges who must defer to the wisdom of parliamentary majorities.
- “Judicial supremacy,” “judicial excessivism,” or “despotism of an oligarchy” are seen as antithetical to democracy. Thus, arrangements of governance embodied in the Constitution resulting from the exercise of their free will cannot be used to deprive the ultimate masters of the right of final decision over their destiny. It is argued that “juridification of politics and politization of the judiciary” would be a loss for both the legislature and judiciary
- Activism of the Court towards a progressive expansion of judicial review has been criticised also on the basis of “institutional competence” where they have neither the competence nor the legitimacy”
 - * The fate of the Court’s majority decision in the Sabarimala case is a resounding affirmation of the logic of the Court’s limited institutional competence and judicial restraint proposed by Justice Indu Malhotra in her minority judgment
 - * In an eloquent exposition in the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) case, Justice Chelameshwar in his eloquent minority judgment rejected a distrust of the legislators in securing the constitutional fundamental and argued that:
- In Manohar Lal Sharma v Union of India, the Court declined to entertain a PIL seeking the Court’s directions to restrain the union government from incurring security and other expenses with respect to certain individuals in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, holding that “nationally sensitive issues concerning the security of the nation ...should be left to the executive ... and that these writs are judicially unmanageable.”

The Court has been blamed for re-writing the Constitution and of judicial legislation in the guise of interpretation. The burgeoning judicial power has been criticised as “little more than an invocation and vehicle for judicial ideologies to masquerade as constitutional evolution,” and “academicians substituting an ideal of justice for the concrete articulation of justice actually in the Constitution”

Importance of Judicial Review

- Expansive Judicial Review jurisdiction is that it advances the cause of justice, human rights, reasonableness, tolerance and the basic principles of morality and good faith, all of which constitute the substantive aspect of democracy and rules out only those choices that are ex-facie unreasonable and inconsistent with democracy
- Human rights are seen as an ethical force to provide “inspiration for legislation” and are strong ethical pronouncements as to what should be done. Hence, the rise of the judiciary as a political and policymaking institution
- Liberal democracy needs to protect itself against “the rule of the mob.”
- John Adams stated that “despotism or unlimited sovereignty or absolute power is the same in a majority of a popular assembly, an aristocratic council, an oligarchical junta and a single emperor”

The Constituent Assembly debates that led to the framing of our Constitution demonstrated likewise, a clear disapproval of concentration of authority, in favour of dispersal and accountable power through institutional balances. It is in this framework of history and philosophy of limited government that the rationale of judicial review power has been repeatedly reiterated by the Court. Thus, in *I R Coelho v State of Tamil Nadu* (2007), the Court, referring to Articles 14, 19 and 21, articulated judicial review as “the principles of constitutionality ... apart from the rule of law and separation of powers,” reasoning that “the principle of constitutionalism is now a legal principle which requires control over the exercise of Government power.”

Conclusion

- The challenge to “reconcile constitutional authority with popular sovereignty” raises larger questions about the quality of democratic representation, the primacy of individual choice and protection against the state’s oppressive power as a guarantee of the inviolability of human rights.
- While the Court’s jurisdiction as sentinel on the quiver for protection and advancement of fundamental rights merits loud affirmation on first principles of constitutionalism, in the articulation of constitutional principles, the Court ought not to be seen as dismissive or disdainful of the processes of democratic governance.

- The presumption that the legislature understands the needs of its people and that even its discrimination and classifications are based on adequate grounds has been acknowledged by the Supreme Court itself.
- In working out a compromise, the exercise of constituent power could be limited by a compelling necessity to intervene for the advancement of human rights
- The logic of balanced exercise of judicial power as an assurance of institutional stability and recognition of the boundaries of power is implicit in the constitutional arrangement and the Court’s fulsome acceptance of judicial fallibility. Evidently, interpretative finality vested in the Supreme Court cannot supplant constitutional supremacy with judicial supremacy.
- Thus Judges, wisened by experience, consistent by training, disciplined by law and elevated by knowledge are presumed to be equipped to weigh and balance competing values and principles—a function central to their role, and thereby establish “a diffusion of power which is characteristic of the whole”

4. Former staff writes to SC judges, alleges sexual harassment by CJI

Background

- A 35-year-old Junior Court Assistant has a complaint detailing allegations of sexual harassment against Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi
- She says CJI made sexual advances in his residence office and her family members were also intimidated.

Gogoi

- Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi presided over an urgent special hearing of the Supreme Court at a very short notice
- He rejected allegations of sexual harassment published against him by some online news portals.
- He asserted that the “judiciary cannot be made a scapegoat” and said “things have gone too far”.
- It was an attempt by a bigger force to “deactivate the office of the Chief Justice of India because sensitive matters are being heard by the court next week”.

Principles of Natural Justice

Two basic principles have been recognised as fundamental in the doctrine of natural justice.

- The first is ‘nemo iudex in causa sua’, that is, ‘no man shall be a judge in his own case’;
- The second is ‘audi alteram partem’, that is, ‘hear the other side.’

Question before SC / Concerns

- How can Chief Justice of India (CJI) become a judge in his own cause by being part of the Bench? After all, the allegations directly pertain to him.
- Two, is there a formal procedure to deal with allegations of sexual harassment against the CJI?
- Three, lack of a mechanism in the higher judiciary to probe charges of sexual misconduct against serving judges.
- Four, in her affidavit, the complainant spoke of specific incidents, harassment of a specific nature, and against a specific person.
 - * Nothing in her sworn affidavit can on the face of it be construed as a general derogatory statement of the Supreme Court as an institution, nor as the general behaviour of judges of the Supreme Court.
 - * If there is an allegation against a specific person who occupies a high office, it is not an assault on the office.
 - * Construing it as such would pave the way to arbitrariness and impunity, and would undermine the Constitution that binds the court in irredeemable ways.

Expectation from the court

- The court is unlike other institutional settings — the Supreme Court is sequestered and the constitutional office of the Chief Justice of India is deemed sacred and inviolable.
- The argument is that an independent judiciary is indispensable to check arbitrariness on the part of the legislature and government.
- What is often forgotten is that an independent judiciary also importantly acts as a check on itself, and must apply the principles of natural justice and fair procedure to itself with greater rigour than it would to the parties that appear before the court.
- The expectation of citizens is that the court will lead by example, not by arbitrary diktat. The expectation also is that constitutional morality will guide the court, especially the Justices of the court, at all times; the constitutional presumption is that the court is not above the Constitution.
- Justice D.Y. Chandrachud's in the judgment on the right to privacy, observed "When histories of nations are written and critiqued, there are judicial decisions at the forefront of liberty. Yet others have to be consigned to the archives, reflective of what was, but should never have been..."?

Conclusion

- How the SC responds to the sexual harassment complaint will test its institutional integrity, and fortify it against attacks.

Visakha case

- The Supreme Court's judgment in 1997 in Visakha v. State of Rajasthan is a watershed in its history.
- In the absence of any domestic law occupying a field providing for measures to check the evils of sexual harassment at all workplaces, the Supreme Court invoked its extraordinary powers under Article 32 to lay down a new law to fill the vacuum.
- In so doing, the judges laid emphasis on Fundamental Rights under Articles 14, 15, 19(1)(g) and 21 of the Constitution together with International Conventions and Article 51C and 253 of the Constitution.
- They emphasised guarantee of gender equality and right to work with human dignity amongst others.
- The judges relied upon the Beijing Declaration of 1995 where the Chief Justices of Asia and Pacific had inter-alia declared that amongst the objectives and functions of the judiciary is 'to ensure that all persons are able to live securely under the Rule of Law'.
- Relying upon 'Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' the judges referred to the rights of women and in particular, the right to work, as an inalienable right of all human beings and to 'the right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction'.

Amongst the guidelines and norms laid down are:

- "1. Duty of the employer or other responsible persons in workplaces and other institutions: It shall be the duty of the employer or other responsible persons in workplaces or other institutions to prevent or deter the commission of acts of sexual harassment.....
- 7. Complaints Committee: The Complaints Committee should be headed by a woman and not less than half of its members should be women...."
- Parliament enacted the law in 2013. It is 'an Act to provide protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace'.
 - * Section 3 expressly declares 'no woman shall be subjected to sexual harassment at any workplace'. The expression 'workplace' is defined in an inclusive manner and though it does not include court premises expressly, they are deemed to be included.
 - * Sections 4 and 7 are relevant and speak about constitution of Internal Complaints Committee and Local Complaints Committee categorically requiring the Chairperson to be a woman employed at a senior level at the workplace or from amongst eminent women from the field of social work and committed to the cause of women.
 - * They also provide that 'members be from amongst the employees, NGO espousing cause of women, etc. be women'

Gender Sensitisation and Sexual Harassment of Women at the Supreme Court of India (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal), Regulations of 2013

Gender Sensitization and Internal Complaints Committee (GSICC)

- It is constituted under the Gender Sensitization and Sexual "Harassment at Supreme Court of India (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Regulations, 2013
- This is headed by a sitting woman judge. It is empowered to deal with cases of sexual harassment on the Supreme Court's premises.
- Under the Regulations, "any member of GSICC may at any time request the chairperson to call an emergency meeting with a notice of 48 hours".

Procedure

- When a complaint is filed, and upon being satisfied with regard to the genuineness of the complaint, the GSICC constitutes an Internal Sub Committee (ISC) to conduct a fact-finding inquiry.
- The ISC, after conducting an inquiry, prepares a report within 90 days and, if the allegations are proved, recommends to the GSICC to take appropriate action.
- The GSICC then passes an order either accepting or rejecting the ISC's inquiry report within 45 days.
- It has the power to caution, prohibit all manner of communication with the complainant, and to pass "all orders" taking steps necessary for putting an end to the sexual harassment of the aggrieved woman.
- The GSICC can also recommend to the CJI to pass orders against the respondent "including, but not limited, to the following": debarment of entry into SC for a specified period extending upto a maximum period of one year, and to recommend filing of a criminal complaint for taking appropriate action.

Concerns

The regulations are clear that an inquiry can be carried out against "any complaint in the Supreme Court limits

- There is no guidelines in Judges enquiry act about procedure to be followed
- The committee here is subordinate to the office of Chief justice
- The regulations on sexual harassment at the Supreme Court do not explicitly lay down the procedure to be adopted when a complaint is received against the CJI.
- There is no clarity, however, on a mechanism to deal with cases of alleged misconduct by sitting judges.
- There could also be certain affiliation, bias due to favoritism or close understanding with sitting CJI

- The Supreme Court has failed to implement Visaka Judgment in its own precincts and the Parliament has failed to apply the Act of 2013 to court premises across the country. Clearly, the judges have kept themselves out of the ambit of the Act and the Regulations, at least in the Supreme Court. This raises very serious questions as to the rationale and justification of doing so.

Previous moves initiated

- In 2014, a panel of two eminent jurists — senior advocates Fali Nariman and the late PP Rao — called for devising a mechanism to provide redressal to those who levelled sexual harassment allegations against sitting judges.
- A bench headed by the then CJI P Sathasivam had nominated the two judges to suggest measures on how to deal with complaints of such nature against sitting and retired judges.
- They found these Regulations did not extend or apply to either sitting or retired judges of the apex court.
- However, the top court has taken no steps to include the recommendations in the regulations nor has it made the disciplinary proceedings by the sexual harassment committee transparent, despite this being a common grievance.

Steps that can be taken up

- In case a complaint is lodged the internal panel should not include any judge from the Supreme Court. It can include a panel of retired Chief Justice or Judges who have not worked with the CJI
- Senior members of the Bar should be asked to enquire into such a complaint

Supreme Court committee

- The SC constituted a committee comprising Justice S.A. Bobde, Justice Indu Malhotra and Justice Indira Banerjee.
- All three judges command universal respect on account of their competence, objectivity, experience and independence.

'In-House Procedure' in Courts

Two purposes are served by the adoption of an internal procedure to deal with such complaints:

- First, when the allegations are examined by the judge's peers, outside agencies are kept out, and the independence of the judiciary is maintained.
- Second, awareness about the existence of a mechanism to examine such complaints will preserve the faith of the people in the impartiality and independence of the judicial process.

- The in-house procedure envisages that false and frivolous allegations can be rejected at an early stage and only those that are not baseless, and may require a deeper probe, are taken up for inquiry.

What is the origin of the 'in-house' procedure?

- The idea of self-regulation as a method by which allegations of misconduct against judges can be approached came up first in a 1995 case concerning the then Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court on the charges of corruption.
 - * The Chief Justice resigned amidst an uproar caused by reports.
 - * In a case relating to this allegation, the Supreme Court outlined the procedure that may be adopted in such situations.
- Until then, misconduct on the part of superior court judges was perceived as something that only Parliament could deal with through the procedure for removal of judges given in the Constitution
 - * However, the court made a distinction between 'impeachable behaviour' and bad behaviour.
- Later, in 1997, when Justice J.S. Verma took over as Chief Justice of India, he took up the issue. He circulated a document titled 'Restatement of Values of Judicial Life', a guide containing the essential elements of ideal behaviour for judges so that their independence and impartiality are beyond reproach.
 - * The Full Court passed a resolution that an 'in-house procedure' would be adopted for action against judges for acts of commission or omission that go against accepted values of judicial life.

When was the in-house procedure adopted?

- A five-judge committee was formed to devise the procedure. The report of the committee was adopted by a resolution of the Full Court on December 15, 1999. This procedure has been adhered to since then. However, the in-house procedure was not in the public domain for many years.
- In 2014, a Supreme Court Bench directed the court's registry to make the in-house procedure public for the sake of transparency.
- The court was then dealing with a serious allegation made by a woman district and sessions court judge that she faced harassment from a sitting judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

How does the in-house procedure work? What are the various steps?

- According to this In-house procedure, when a complaint is received against a Judge of the High Court, by the Chief Justice of the High Court, he shall first examine it himself.

- * If it is found by him that it is frivolous or directly related to the merits of a substantive decision in a judicial matter or does not involve any serious complaint of misconduct or impropriety, he shall file the complaint and inform the CJI accordingly.

- If however, it is found by him that the complaint is of a serious nature, involving misconduct or impropriety, he shall ask for the response thereto of the concerned Judge.
- If on a consideration of the allegations in the complaint, in the light of the response of the concerned Judge, the Chief Justice of the High Court is satisfied that no further action is necessary, he shall file the complaint and inform the CJI accordingly.
- Further, if the Chief Justice of the High Court is of the opinion that the allegations contained in the complaint need a deeper probe, he shall forward to the CJI, the complaint and the response of the Judge concerned along with his comments.
- The panel further suggested that if the CJI is of opinion that a deeper probe is needed against the HC judge, then a three-member committee of two Chief Justices of other High Courts and one High Court judge would be formed to conduct an inquiry by devising its own procedures.

What are the possible outcomes from the inquiry committee?

- If it finds that there is substance in the allegations, the committee can either hold that the misconduct is serious enough to warrant removal from office, or that it is not so serious as to warrant removal.
- In the former case, it will call for initiation of proceedings to remove the judge.
 - * The judge concerned would be advised to resign or take voluntary retirement.
 - * If the judge is unwilling to quit, the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned would be advised to withdraw judicial work from him, and the President of India and the Prime Minister would be informed of the situation.
 - * Such an action may clear the way for Parliament to begin the political process for impeachment.
- In case, the committee finds substance in the allegation, but it is not grave enough to warrant removal from office, the judge concerned would be advised accordingly, and the committee's report will be placed on record.

5. Gubernatorial Impropriety

Context

- Rajasthan Governor Kalyan Singh had said the country and society needs Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government to return to power.
- This has reignited the debate on the independence and neutrality of the constitutional post of Governor for the incumbent's political views

Examples from the past

- The last time a state Governor was found violating the Code was in the early 90s when Gulsher Ahmad, the then Governor of Himachal Pradesh, was pulled up by the EC for campaigning for his son Sayeed Ahmed in Madhya Pradesh.
- He quit the post when the Commission expressed displeasure over the misuse of official machinery for his son's poll campaign.

Important Arguments about Governor's office

- The Sarkaria Commission described the Governor as "a Constitutional sentinel and a vital link between the Union and the State."
- In *Hargovind Pant v. Raghukul Tilak* (1979), the Supreme Court affirmed that the "office of the Governor was not subordinate or subservient to the Government of India".
 - * In *S.R. Bommai* (1994), the Supreme Court said, "The office of the Governor... is intended to ensure protection and sustenance of the constitutional process of the working of the Constitution by the elected executive."
- M.K. Gandhi said about the Governor's office: "He would be an arbiter when there was a constitutional deadlock in the State and he would be able to play an impartial role."
- According to B.R. Ambedkar, "He is the representative not of a party; he is the representative of the people as a whole of the State. It is in the name of the people that he carries on the administration."

Role of Governor

- In the contemporary constitutional landscape, the Governor is expected to advance the cause of 'federalism' and 'democracy', which form a part of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- In *Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India* (2018), then Chief Justice of India, Dipak Misra, clarified that democracy and federalism are firmly imbibed in India's constitutional ethos, while reiterating that democracy requires the constant affirmation of constitutional morality.

Issue Area

- There is cloud of vagueness surrounding the process of appointing and removing the Governor, doubts have been raised about the 'legal nature' of his office.
- Despite his unique constitutional positioning, the Governor is sometimes not seen as willing or able to discharge his functions as judiciously, impartially and efficiently as envisaged by the first Administrative Reforms Commission.
- A scrutiny of the reports of the Sarkaria, Punchhi and Venkatachaliah Commissions reveals that the independence and dignity of the gubernatorial office is invariably undermined by the appointment of persons not suited to the post, the lack of security of tenure, the lack of an appropriate removal mechanism, with no reasonable post-retirement benefits and limitations on post-retirement political ingratiation

Conclusion

- The promise of the institution remains as underwhelming as ever while the perils continue to multiply.
- It is high time that the recommendations of the relevant commissions are implemented in letter and spirit to obviate the danger of a full-blown constitutional crisis, to buttress constitutional morality and to restore the dignity of this office.

6. Khasi 'kingdoms' to revisit 1947 agreements

Context

- A federation of 25 Himas or Khasi kingdoms have plans of revisiting the 1948 agreements that made present-day Meghalaya a part of India.

Details

- The revisiting in consultation with legal experts and academicians is aimed at safeguarding tribal customs and traditions from Central laws in force or could be enacted, such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill.
- The idea is to hold series of meetings to come to a conclusion on how best they can insulate their customs and traditions from overriding central rules and policies
- Though the Constitution has provided self-rule to a considerable extent through tribal councils, there has been an increasing demand for giving more teeth to the Khasi states.

Background

- The 25 Khasi states had signed the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement with the Dominion of India between December 15, 1947, and March 19, 1948.
- The conditional treaty with these states was signed by Governor General Chakravarty Rajagopalachari on August 17, 1948.

- During the British rule, the Khasi domain was divided into the Khasi states and British territories.
 - * At that time, the British government had no territorial right on the Khasi states and they had to approach the chiefs of these states if they needed land for any purpose.
 - * After independence,
- The Khasi states, though, did not sign the Instrument of Merger unlike most other states in India.

7. Plea in SC on voting rights of undertrials and convicts

Context:

- The Supreme Court is hearing a plea filed by a law student questioning an electoral law which denies undertrials and convicts their right to vote.

Provision under Representation of People Act:

- Section 62(5) of the Representation of People Act of 1951 mandates that “no person shall vote at any election if he is confined in a prison, whether under a sentence of imprisonment or transportation or otherwise, or is in the lawful custody of the police.
- The provisions however exempt a person held under preventive detention from this rigour.

Background:

- In Anukul Chandra Pradhan vs Union of India, the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the provisions of section 62(5) of the Representation of Peoples Act, 1951 on two grounds;
 - * firstly that Article 14 does not affect it, and
 - * secondly the Court observed that the right to vote is subject to the limitations imposed by the statute which can be exercised only in the manner provided by the statute prescribing the nature of the rights to elect cannot be made with reference to fundamental rights in the Constitution.
- The denial of voting rights to prisoners is meant to prevent breach of law but persons in jail after conviction or during investigation and trial subsequent to the commission of crimes should be put on different footing, such distinction not being sufficient by itself. A person, who is under trial, may be found innocent.
- The concept of restriction on voting right evolved as it could have violated the fundamental rights of others but there is no reasonable explanation one can give for such restriction being imposed on the under trials.

Details

- The petition, represented by advocate Zoheb Hossain, highlights how the Section sees both an undertrial and a convicted person equally.

- The former's guilt is yet to be proved in a court. A person is innocent until proven guilty by law.
- Despite this, it denies an undertrial the right to vote but allows a detainee the same.
- However, a person out on bail is allowed to cast his vote.
- The petitioner points out that the wording of the section uses “confinement” as the yardstick thereby creating several anomalies.
- In addition to convicts who have been sentenced to a particular period of imprisonment, even under-trials, whose innocence or guilt has not been conclusively determined, are deprived of their right to vote, as they too are confined in prison, although they have not been sentenced to imprisonment.
- A convict who has been imprisoned as part of her sentence can still cast her vote if she is released on bail. This is because such a person is not per se confined in prison
- The plea argued that the provision violates the rights to equality, vote (Article 326) and is arbitrary. It is not a reasonable restriction.
- The petitioner has also raised violation of Article 326 of the Constitution submitting that right to vote is a Constitutional right under Article 326 of the Constitution, as was held by the Supreme Court in People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v Union of India and Rajbala v State of Haryana
- The provision operates in the nature of a blanket ban, as it lacks any kind of reasonable classification based on the nature of the crime committed or the duration of the sentence imposed. This lack of classification is anathema to the fundamental right to equality under Article 14, the petition contends.
- It is the petitioner's submission that any curtailment of such a right must be based upon permissible restrictions found within the Constitution itself, and in the absence of any such restrictions, the curtailment in question is ultra vires the Constitution.

8. Right to Travel Abroad

Context

- The Supreme Court has observed that the right to travel abroad is a genuine and basic human right like marriage and family

Background

- Satish Chandra Verma, Inspector General of Police, Central Reserve Police Force at Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu
- He was denied permission to take a private trip abroad to visit relatives as he had a departmental enquiry pending against him despite the fact that he had no criminal case against him.

- Central Administrative Tribunal, Chennai Bench, and the Madras High Court denied him his right.
- The High Court upheld the tribunal's position that he cannot travel abroad without vigilance clearance.

Details

- It referred to its Maneka Gandhi judgment upholding the right to travel
- It also referred to landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of 1958 Kent vs Dulles.
- The Bench quoted the majority opinion of Justice William O. Douglas in the latter case which said "freedom to go abroad has much social value and represents the basic human right of great significance".
- The SC said "The right to travel abroad is an important basic human right for it nourishes independent and self-determining creative character of the individual, not only by extending his freedoms of action, but also by extending the scope of his experience,"
- The 'right to travel abroad' is a fundamental right under Article 21, but it is "not an absolute one," and it is subject to certain limitations
 - * Right to go abroad, an aspect of personal liberty, cannot be curtailed
 - * Even if it is subjected to control it cannot be arbitrary, unfair, oppressive or unreasonable. Such procedure has to be just, fair and reasonable

9. Section 77 in the Representation of the People Act, 1951

It was ins Account of election expenses and maximum thereof.

(1) Every candidate at an election shall, either by himself or by his election agent, keep a separate and correct account of all expenditure in connection with the election incurred or authorised by him or by his election agent between 2[the date on which he has been nominated] and the date of declaration of the result thereof, both dates inclusive.

(a) The expenditure incurred by leaders of a political party on account of travel by air or by any other means of transport for propagating programme of the political party shall not be deemed to be the expenditure in connection with the election incurred or authorised by a candidate of that political party or his election agent for the purposes

If leaders of a political party pay for their use of helicopters and chartered planes, the candidate need not declare them as part of his poll expenses to the Election Commission

- Concerning to expenses incurred on Helicopter or Aircrafts, the ECI directed that if the name of star campaigner of the political party has been intimated to the ECI and chief election official (CEO) within seven-days of notification of election, then the travel expense of the Star campaigner will not be added to the expenditure of the candidate.

Star Campaigners

- The ECI has given directive that the expenditure on travel expenses of Star Campaigners, as per the provisions of Representation of Peoples Act 1951, incurred by the leaders of a political party on account of travel by air or by any other means shall not be deemed to be expenditure in connection with the election incurred or authorized by a candidate.
- Political parties are entitled to nominate "Star Campaigners" during General Elections. A recognized National or State party can have a maximum of 40 "Star campaigners" and a registered un-recognised party can nominate a maximum of 20 'Star Campaigners'.
- The travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.

EC

- In the event of public rally or meeting by the star campaigner's, if there is more than one contestants, sharing the dais besides displaying banners or posters with their names in rally/meeting, then the expenses on such rally/meeting would be equally divided among all such contestants, stated the ECI directive mentioning the returning officer (RO) of the constituency would have to pass on the information about the presence of other contestants in the rally to the respective ROS for making necessary entry of expenditure in the Shadow Observation Register (SOR) of the contestants.
- If the candidate's is/are sharing the transport facility with the star campaigner, then 50% of the expenditure and if more than one candidate(s) is sharing the facilities then 50% of the travel the expenditure is to be apportioned among the contestants, stated the ECI directive.

10. Supreme Court should reconsider setting up Benches in different States

Introduction

- The justice system in any democracy is set up, under the Constitution to serve the public without "fear or favour, affection or ill-will" as far as judges are concerned.
- Sitting judges of the Supreme Court in the past have advised Chief Justice of India to decide against the request of the then Central government to sit in other places in the country under Article 130 of the Constitution.
 - * Seat of Supreme Court: The Supreme Court shall sit in Delhi or in such other place or places, as the Chief Justice of India may, with the approval of the President, from time to time, appoint
- The reason judges decided against it was because they that the authority of the Supreme Court would get diluted.

The reasoning of SC is fallacious.

- Many High Courts in this country have different Benches for meting out justice without 'justice' being 'diluted'.
- For example, the Bombay High Court has four Benches — in Mumbai, Aurangabad, Nagpur and Panaji (Goa) — and the quality of its decisions or status have certainly not been diluted thereby.
- The number of Benches depends on the size of the State, the idea being to facilitate easier access to justice.

Issue Area

- First, the Supreme Court sitting only in Delhi has resulted in excellent lawyers from other High Courts not appearing before the Supreme Court, possibly because it casts too large a monetary burden on their clients, many of whom are impoverished.
- Second, all lawyers, whatever their calibre or competence, who happen to be in Delhi now appear in the Supreme Court. Some of the good lawyers who were able to leave lucrative practices in the High Courts have settled down in Delhi, but they have established a monopoly, and, as a result, charge unconscionable fees even from charitable concerns — sometimes even when they do not appear at the hearing. This is also true of litigating lawyers at all levels of the judicial system.
- The third fallout of the failure to act under Article 130 is that the Supreme Court in Delhi has been flooded with work and been reduced to a District Court instead of a Court of Final Appeal and Constitutional Court as envisaged under the Constitution.
- *AM Krishna vs Union of India & Ors*, claimed that an additional bench of the apex court should be set up in south, west and north-eastern parts of the country. The Supreme Court of India, located in New Delhi, is at a considerable distance from the south and north-eastern parts of India.
 - * Due to this, poor clients face difficulty in affording the increasing transportation and lodging expenses, for themselves and their lawyers.
- In addition, every citizen should have access to justice as part of their human rights, as envisioned under Article 39 (A) of the Constitution of India.

Unethical Principles set by lawyers

- Some of the lawyers specialising in victim compensation cases do not charge any fees for their services and render services free of cost.
 - * They thus take huge money as a percentage of compensation amount awarded towards victim compensation. Such a practice is frustrating the whole purpose of victim compensation.

- The procedure is similar to that adopted by some advocates dealing with Motor Accident Claim Cases under Section 166 (application for compensation) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.
 - * They agree to conduct the cases without a fee, but in the event of compensation being granted by the court, the advocates get a certain percentage.
- Such lawyers effectively create a perception of rendering a benevolent service by not charging any fees so the victim could never suspect him/her of any malpractice. Incidentally, according to a study carried out by a research organisation, Vidhi, in the Delhi High Court, more than 70% of the delays in the disposal of cases are attributable to lawyers, a major reason being sometimes unjust pleas for adjournments.

Suggestions in the past

- Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, in 2010, suggested an alternate remedy than the setting up of an additional bench. By referring to the US model, said that we should create another tier in our judiciary, between the High Court and the Supreme Court.

The way forward

Therefore, to hound out the corrupt lawyers from the system at all levels so that justice may be truly rendered to the public

- First, the Supreme Court should reconsider setting up Benches in different States in keeping with the recommendations of the Law Commissions (125th Report and 229th Report).
- Second, the Bar Council of India should exercise its powers under the Advocates Act, 1961 more effectively. If not, the disciplinary jurisdiction must be returned to the judiciary as was the position prior to the Advocates Act, 1961 by repealing the 1961 Act.
- Third, lawyers should be made irrelevant by referring more cases to trained mediators, as the Supreme Court has done in the Ayodhya dispute.

11. Tender Vote

- A voter is entitled to cast a 'tender vote' if he or she finds out that someone has already cast a vote in their name.
- Accordingly a tendered ballot paper, as per Rule 49P of the Conduct of Elections Rules, will be given to that voter and they will be required to sign their name on the list of tendered votes.
- After marking their choice of candidate with the help of the arrow cross mark rubber stamp, the voter should hand over the tendered ballot paper to the presiding officer, who will keep it in a separate cover.
 - * Tender votes are cast on ballot papers that are then sealed and locked away.

- * In such a case, the voter will not cast their vote on the EVM
- Further, in case their identity as a voter is challenged by a polling agent of any candidate on the grounds that they are not the person whose name is listed on the rolls, the presiding officer will ask the challenger to provide evidence in proof of his claim

12. **Trickeries of the money bill**

Introduction

- The Supreme Court has is hearing oral arguments in Revenue Bar Association (RBA) v. Union of India, in which the validity of the Finance Act of 2017, insofar as it affects the structure and functioning of various judicial tribunals, is under challenge.
- The Finance Act, which is enacted at the beginning of every accounting year, seeks to give effect to the government's fiscal policies. In 2017, however, the state used the statute without precision.
- It not only set the fiscal agenda for the year ahead but it also toppled the existing regime governing the working of 26 different judicial bodies.

Rules about Tribunals

India has numerous tribunals that look into matters pertaining to company law, environmental law, competition law, intellectual property law, employment disputes, censorship, taxation, customs, securities regulation, debt recovery, telecom disputes, consumer disputes, service issues pertaining to the civil and military personnel, claims against the railways and other regulatory disputes. Such tribunals have proliferated.

- Each of these panels in Tribunals was governed by a separate statute, and those laws individually contained a set of principles providing for, among other things, the criteria employed to select and remove members to and from these bodies, and for salaries, allowances and other such service conditions of the members.
- The act was aimed at streamlining an increasingly unwieldy system of tribunals by winding up some existing tribunals and merging their functions into existing tribunals.
 - * Therefore Finance Act not only abolished some of the tribunals but also altogether repealed the standards provided in the different statutes.
- In their place, the law vested in the Central government an absolute, untrammelled power to make rules to effectively govern the operation of the tribunals.
 - * These amendments also transfer to the central government the power to draft rules pertaining to the appointment, qualifications, terms of office and removal of the tribunal chairperson and members.

- * This effectively gives bureaucrats of the central government the power to draft the qualification and appointment criteria for a multitude of tribunals and Parliament is not required to vote on these rules.
- * The danger of this setup from a policy perspective is that once power is delegated to the Centre, each ministry is free to amend the rules for the tribunals under it as per its convenience and no permission is required from Parliament.
- * Such a setup is almost certainly unconstitutional and illegal as the Supreme Court has made it clear that essential legislative functions cannot be delegated to the executive.

Concerns raised after abolishing few Tribunals

- The petitioners argued that this move runs sharply athwart judicial independence.
- The new law, in their belief, deputed to the executive what was really an essential legislative function.
- Many of these tribunals, which included the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, and the Industrial Disputes Tribunal, they pointed out, performed roles that were originally undertaken by the higher judiciary.
- To assign to the executive's whims the task of establishing the criteria employed in selecting members to the panels and to provide for the members' service conditions was, therefore, pernicious to the basic principle of separation of powers.
- A consequence of this move is that, Despite the Supreme Court's previous ruling that the chairperson of a judicial tribunal ought to be equivalent to the Chief Justice of the high courts, as a result of the rules now made in furtherance of the Finance Act, in 13 different tribunals, a person who is merely qualified to be appointed as a judge of a high court can be selected as the presiding officer.
- The RBA's case, though, goes beyond questions concerning delegation of power.
 - * Substantive matters concerning the governing of tribunals, one would think, can scarcely be considered as a fiscal measure.
 - * Yet the draft law which introduced these provisions was classified as a money bill, and the sanction of the Rajya Sabha was altogether dodged.

History of money bill

- The idea behind a money bill is derived from British parliamentary custom.
- But unlike in Britain, where judicial review of the Speaker's opinion is unambiguously prohibited, in India, Article 110 avoids creating any such bar.

- Money bills exist simply to ensure that the Rajya Sabha isn't allowed to bring down a government by refusing it access to the exchequer for everyday governance.
- To use it as a means to nullify the Upper House's democratic role in making substantive legislation denigrates the Constitution's form

Conclusion

- The dispute over the Finance Act of 2017, therefore, assumes particular significance. In deciding the case, the court will do well to pay heed to Ambedkar's warnings, by recognising that the niceties of constitutional form are not a matter of trifles.

ELECTIONS

13. M1, M2 and M3 EVMs

- M1
 - * Manufactured: 1989-2006
 - * Last used: 2014 general elections
 - * Not compatible with VVPAT
- M2 EVMs
 - * Manufactured: 2006-2012
 - * EVMs can cater to a maximum of 64 candidates including NOTA by linking four balloting units.
- M3 EVMs
 - * Manufactured: 2013
 - * EVMs can cater to a maximum of 384 candidates including NOTA by connecting 24 Balloting Units.

Features

The new M3 EVM produced after 2013 have additional features like Tamper Detection and Self Diagnostics.

- The Tamper Detection Feature makes an EVM inoperative the moment anyone tries to open the machine.
- The Self Diagnostic Feature checks the EVM fully every time it is switched on. Any change in its hardware or software will be detected.
 - * M3- a more sophisticated machine with built in self diagnostics, minimal chances of machine failure and the ability to clamp shut the moment any tampering effort is made.

14. Rule 49MA of the Conduct of Elections Rules

It was inserted to prescribe the procedure to be followed in case of complaint made by the elector about alleged wrong particulars of a candidate, symbol on paper slip generated by the printer on casting votes using the EVM.

- Any person making a claim about the malfunction after casting his vote has to make a declaration, after which the person is allowed to cast a "test" vote.
- If the allegation is found true, the presiding officer shall report the facts immediately to the returning officer, stop further recording of votes in that voting machine and act as per the direction that may be given by the Returning Officer.
- If the allegation is false, a case under Section 177 of the IPC is made out.
- It prescribes simple imprisonment for a term extending to six months, or with fine of Rs.1,000, or both.

15. Two Voter ID's

- Section 17 in the Representation of the People Act, 1950
 - * 17. No person to be registered in more than one constituency.—No person shall be entitled to be registered in the electoral roll for more than one constituency
- Section 18 in the Representation of the People Act, 1950
 - * 18. No person to be registered more than once in any constituency.—No person shall be entitled to be registered in the electoral roll for any constituency more than once.
- "31. Making false declarations.—If any person makes in connection with—
 - * the preparation, revision or correction of an electoral roll, or
 - * the inclusion or exclusion of any entry in or from an electoral roll,
 - * a statement or declaration in writing which is false and which he either knows or believes to be false or does not believe to be true, he shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both."
- In the case of Keshav Lal Thakur v. State of Bihar, (1996), the Supreme Court has clearly held that offence under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, is a non-cognizable offence.

Context

- AAP accuses Gautam Gambhir for having two voter IDs

16. NaMo TV

Background

- The new channel NaMo TV has been at the centre of controversy during the poll season, with the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress submitting complaints against it with the Election Commission

- The Information & Broadcasting Ministry is learnt to have responded to the EC that NaMo TV does not fall under its purview since it is functioning as a special platform for DTH (direct-to-home) operators

Details

- The channel, also briefly named Content TV, emerged across major DTH platforms.
- The channel is listed among Hindi News channels on some DTH platforms. However, no such channel is mentioned in the list of channels permitted by I&B Ministry.
- All satellite-based channels require the ministry's permission to be downlinked in the country irrespective of the content, or the platform it is available on.

How is this channel allowed, then?

- As per the Constitution, legislative & executive power over 'Posts and telegraphs; telephones, wireless, broadcasting, and other like forms of communication' vests with the Union.
- I&B Ministry has apparently told the Election Commission that NaMo TV is a 'platform service'. For such services, I&B permission is not necessary.

And what is a Platform Service?

- There are several ways that viewers can receive a channel on their TV — cable TV services that can be received through Multi-System Operators and/or Local Cable Operators, DTH services, Internet Protocol Television services, Headend-in-the-Sky, and terrestrial TV services in smaller geographic regions. Together they are called Distribution Platform Operators (DPOs).
- Platform services are certain channels that are provided by local cable operators and DTH operators, exclusively to their own viewers.
 - * These are not offered by broadcasters (those that run satellite-based channels) and are outside the purview of regulations currently.
 - * On the other hand, satellite-based channels can only be broadcast if they are registered with the Government of India, which means these have I&B permissions.
- Platform services were defined by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India during a consultation on them in 2014 as: "Platform services (PS) are programs transmitted by Distribution Platform Operators (DPOs) exclusively to their own subscribers and does not include Doordarshan channels and registered TV channels.
- PS shall not include foreign TV channels that are not registered in India.

There are four types of channels on TV:

- Private satellite channels, which are broadcast through satellites and need I&B permissions;
- Doordarshan channels run by public broadcaster Prasar Bharati;
- Platform Services Channels, which are owned and operated by the DPOs and distributed exclusively to their own subscribers;
- Ground-Based Channels that come with a strong local focus and are referred to as "local channels", usually an integral part of most cable TV networks.

What can come under such services?

- Local cable operators often use such channels to show content relevant to their geographical area, and which includes local news.
- DTH operators, however, have used such platform services to offer subscribers access to content 'on demand', like movies-on-demand, video-on-demand, pay-per-view, and interactive services such as games, education, etc., which are paid for by the subscribers.

Are such services not regulated at all?

- Since these services do not require permissions from I&B Ministry, they cannot be punished by that Ministry, which can take action only against conventional channels listed with it.
- However, regardless of who owns the service, two laws are still applicable: restrictions on free speech mentioned in Article 19 of the Constitution would come into play about what is being shown on such platform services, regardless of whether it is registered with the I&B Ministry or not; and
- The content on such services has to comply with the Advertisement and the Programme Codes of the Cable TV Act, 1994.

Issue Area

- NaMo TV is violating the 'election silence' as provided under Section 126 of Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1951.
 - * Section 126 of the Act "prohibits" display of "any election matter by means of cinematograph, television or other similar apparatus" in the 48-hour period before polling concludes in an area.
- As the identity of the channel and the owner remains mysterious, NaMo TV's presence raises questions not only about a ruling party's exertions of power in the media space but also the possibility of violating the model code of conduct

Merits of such channels

- Candidates usually travel during election season to reach out to people, present to them party achievements. If this can be telecasted through TV why not? It is a tool of electioneering

- This will reduce amount of time and it will save a lot of money, for everybody. It will avoid inconvenience to people. Reduce traffic and congestion due to election rallies

Way forward

- With technological upgradation such things should be allowed as a tool to influence its voters and communicate the party achievements but if a party is running its own TV channel, rules should be laid to include the expenditure in their election expenditure so that it is within the stipulated limits.
- At the same time one cannot allow a government channel (such as Doordarshan) to be partial to a political party. So having reasonable restrictions on them should be way forward to ensure a fair play.

Election Commission stopped Movie on 'PM Narendra Modi'

Context

- The Election Commission stalled the release of 'PM Narendra Modi', the biopic starring Vivek Oberoi, until the completion of the Lok Sabha election process.
- The order also references complaints about the films Lakshmi's NTR and Udyama Simham – a biopic of K. Chandrashekar Rao, the chief minister of Telangana.

What did the EC say?

- The Election Commission ordered that "any biopic material in the nature of biography/hagiography sub-serving the purposes of any political entity or any individual entity connected to it, which is intended to, or which has the potential to disturb the level playing field during the elections, should not be displayed in electronic media including cinematograph during the operation of MCC" (Model Code of Conduct).
- The Commission's order underlined that "under Article 324 of the Constitution, superintendence, direction and control of elections are bestowed upon the Commission and it is the duty of the Commission to take necessary measures to create a level playing field and provide a conducive electoral environment to all the stakeholders."
- It said that this would act as "a kind of surrogate publicity by the candidate or the political party during the period of MCC".

17. EC curbs campaigning by Yogi, Mayawati, Maneka and Azam

Context

- The Election Commission imposed restrictions on the campaigning of four senior politicians for violating the model code of conduct in Uttar Pradesh.

Details

- Adityanath and Azam Khan are barred for three days (72 hours) starting Tuesday morning, Maneka Gandhi and Mayawati cannot campaign for two days (48 hours) beginning at 6 a.m. on Tuesday.

- The Election Commission here has censured the four politicians, by preventing them from giving interviews or making any comment on the electronic, print or social media in connection with the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

Comments

- The punitive action was taken against the BSP chief for appealing directly to Muslim voters
- Adityanath was punished for his "Ali and Bajrangbali" remark at a Meerut rally on April 9 and the "green virus" comment
- Ms. Gandhi violated the provisions of the model code as laid down in Para 3 and 4 of Part-1 of the 'General Conduct' section, pertaining to bribing or intimidation of voters.
 - * The EC said she had also violated Section 123 (corrupt practices) of the Representation of the People Act, reprimanding her for the conduct.
- Azam Khan spoke words which were against modesty of Women.

The EC had issued a detailed 286-page Code of Conduct for parties

- "No appeal shall be made on the basis of caste/communal feelings of the voters; no activities which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes/communities/religious/linguistic groups shall be attempted; and no temples/mosques/churches/gurudwaras or any place of worship is to be used for election propaganda, including speeches, posters, music etc or electioneering".
- Separately, the Commission has asked parties and candidates to desist from displaying photographs of defence personnel or photographs of functions involving defence personnel, in campaign advertisements.

Tackling hate speech

Some laws that can be used in speeches that are communally sensitive or incite religious feelings:

(i) Indian Penal Code, 1860

- Section 124A / PC penalises sedition
- Section 153A / PC penalises 'promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony'

(ii) Representation of The People Act, 1951

- Section 123(3A) and Section 125 prohibits promotion of enmity on grounds of religion, race, caste, community or language in connection with election as a corrupt electoral practice and prohibits it

(iii) Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995

- Sections 5 and 6 of the Act prohibit transmission or re-transmission of a programme through cable network in contravention to the prescribed programme code or advertisement code

(vi) Cinematograph Act, 1952

- Sections 4, 5B and 7 empower the Board of Film Certification to prohibit and regulate the screening of a film

Significance

- In censuring these leaders for their polarising rhetoric and limiting their public interactions, the commission sent out a clear message about what is not acceptable.

- There can be no excuse for the misogyny of Khan's comments.
 - * It has taken a tough stand on sexism and misogyny
 - * No party can defend comments that demean and intimidate women, limiting their participation in politics.
 - * Taking decisive action against Khan would set a mark to candidates and political leaders to take a long and hard look at their public utterances.

What could be done?

- Keeping a close eye on every public utterance is difficult for the commission given that the number of candidates is in the order of thousands and spread across the country.
- In the age of social media and the ubiquitous mobile phone, politicians do not have the luxury of denying something atrocious they have said: a videographed record would circulate soon enough.
- It makes sense for the commission to pick up the cases of clear violation and issue demonstrable and exemplary punishment.
- It would send out the message that words do matter and have consequences.

Demeaning women is an assault on our politics

Introduction

- Women in Indian politics face a double disadvantage.
- The first is the difficulty in getting a foot in through the door in a male-dominated arena. Women account for only 12.15% of the outgoing 16th Lok Sabha.
- The second is facing unacceptable sexist remarks from male colleagues. The latest to face this is Jaya Prada. This is the kind of raw deal that women of calibre, regardless of their political affiliation, are offered in Indian politics.

Comments which needs warning

- Smriti Irani, despite her achievements, has often been dismissed as a mere television actress.
- Sharad Yadav felt it was important to discuss former Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje's weight.
- Lalu Prasad spoke of how he would make Bihar's roads as smooth as Hema Malini's cheeks.
- From being described as akin to a sex worker to her gender being questioned, four-time Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Mayawati, has been at the receiving end of a staggering amount of vitriol.

Concerns

- Politics needs a quantum increase in women to be genuinely representative.
- Viciousness faced by women, who have held their own in what is a highly competitive world, is bound to deter other women who might want to consider politics as a career.

- Politics need not have so much to do with gender. A person's ability to take up a relevant issue and being able to work for the wellbeing of constituents should be the only criteria. After all, men are not judged on their looks or their weight. This lack of respect towards women demonstrates that many male politicians are simply unable to accept women as their equals.

Conclusion

- To demean women politicians on issues that are irrelevant to the political discourse is repugnant. It is as much an assault on women as it is on our politics.

ECONOMY

1. Bamboo rice

- The rare rice grows out of a dying bamboo shoot.
- It grows only twice or thrice in a century.
- This variety looks like paddy rice and tastes more like wheat
- It is believed to have low glycaemic index compared to other varieties and it is good for diabetics. It's rich in proteins and does not contain any fat.

Context:

- The rare variety, which was last harvested in Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary in 1979 has currently surfaced in Odisha

2. 'Bt brinjal being illegally grown in Haryana'

Context:

- Farmer groups have alleged that Bt brinjal, a genetically modified variety, is being cultivated illegally in Haryana

Background

- In 2010 the government placed an indefinite ban on commercial release of Bt brinjal, developed by Mahyco, and called for more independent scientific studies to establish its biosafety as India is a centre of diversity for brinjal, both domesticated as well as wild.
- The genetically modified brinjal is a suite of transgenic brinjals (also known as an eggplant or aubergine) created by inserting a crystal protein gene (Cry1Ac) from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* into the genome of various brinjal cultivars.
- The insertion of the gene, along with other genetic elements such as promoters, terminators and an antibiotic resistance marker gene into the brinjal plant is accomplished using *Agrobacterium*-mediated genetic transformation.
- The Bt brinjal has been developed to give resistance against lepidopteron insects, in particular the Brinjal Fruit and Shoot Borer (*Leucinodes orbonalis*) (FSB).
 - * Upon ingestion of the Bt toxin, the insect's digestive processes are disrupted, ultimately resulting in its death.
 - * it will reduce the farmers' dependence on pesticides and enable higher yields
- Mahyco, an Indian seed company based in Jalna, Maharashtra, has developed the Bt brinjal.

Concerns

- This is clearly a failure of the government agencies concerned that illegal Bt brinjal is being cultivated in the country
- This is not the first time this is happening. Bt cotton was approved in India after large-scale illegal cultivation was discovered in Gujarat.
- In late 2017, when illegal GM soy cultivation was discovered in Gujarat and a complaint lodged with GEAC, the response was quite slow and dangerously lackadaisical

3. Commodity Derivatives Advisory Committee (CDAC)

Context

- It was a panel constituted by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to review the commodity segment and suggest measures to improve the depth and efficiency of the market.
- It has recommended opening the commodity derivatives segment to all categories of institutional investors in a phased manner, to enhance the depth and liquidity of the commodity market.

Details

- It has suggested that the capital markets regulator should adopt a 'calibrated approach' before opening up the segment to overseas investors.
- The panel is of the view that in the next phase, institutional investors like foreign portfolio investors, banks, insurance companies and pension funds should be allowed in the commodity derivatives segment.

4. Cross-LoC trade suspended after 'misuse by arms, drugs smugglers'

- Cross-LoC trade was started in 2008 by setting up two Trade Facilitation Centres located at Uri's Salamabad in Baramulla, and Chakkan-da-Bagh in Poonch.
- The trade took place four days a week. It was based on barter system and zero duty basis.
- LoC trade is meant to facilitate exchange of goods of common use between local populations across the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir.

How is cross-LoC trade different?

Business across the LoC is different because it works on a barter system between traders on both sides of Kashmir. So far, 21 goods has been approved for barter, which include handicrafts, saffron, mushrooms, fruit, cereals, honey, spices and carpets.

- Since the Line of Control is disputed between India and Pakistan and not recognised as an International Boundary (IB), the goods are referred to as 'traded out' and 'traded-in', instead of exports and imports.
- Also, unlike regular cross-border trade between India and Pakistan at the Wagah-Attari border, cross-LoC trade takes place only four days a week.

Context

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) suspended the cross-Line of Control (LoC) trade in Jammu and Kashmir, citing "funnelling of illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency" as reasons.

Details

- A probe by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) which said suggested that a significant number of concerns engaged in the trade are being operated by persons closely associated with banned terrorist organisations.
- Investigations further revealed that some individuals, who have crossed over to Pakistan, and joined terror organizations have opened trading firms in Pakistan.
- These trading firms are under the control of terror organizations and are engaged in LOC trade. Inputs have also been received that in order to evade the consequent higher duty, LOC trade is likely to be misused to a much larger extent.
- According to the authorities, numerous seizures have been made recently of pistols, grenades, spares and ammunition, including one particularly large cache concealed in a consignment of bananas.
- The drug hauls have been sizeable too: in 2017, J&K police found 66.5 kg of suspected heroin worth ₹300 crore packed between boxes of garments in a truck that came from PoK, while five other seizures yielded nearly ₹1 crore in counterfeit notes.
- It is also being argued that the zero-tariff barter arrangement is being violated through under-invoicing and the exchange of third party items such as U.S.-origin California almonds.
 - * Trade has expanded to include non-Kashmiri goods.

Previous Suspensions

- Once in 2015, trade was suspended for 40 days after drugs were discovered in a truck from Muzaffarabad.
- There were brief spells when trade was suspended, mostly at Chakan da Bagh, on account of heavy cross-border shelling.
- The longest suspension came during the post-Burhan Wani killing agitation in the Valley, for three months.

Economic benefits

- The benefits to the local economies from the cross-LoC trade are beyond doubt. It is estimated that since the barter trade commenced along two routes across the LoC in October 2008, employment to the order of more than 1.6 lakh days had been created.
- The volume of trade over the decade has crossed ₹6,000 crore.
- It must be kept in mind that the trade is mostly of local goods, and those employed, including in the transportation, are from border communities.

Helps in ensuring peace

- Cross LoC bus service that was flagged off in 2005, cross-LoC trade between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir followed up, these two measures are categorised as "Kashmir specific confidence building measures" which helped both countries to continue the backchannel negotiations in the belief that this would give both sides legroom to "remake" India-Pakistan relations.
- The involvement of former militants in the trade, this was seen as a welcome development towards creating "constituencies of peace" and building stakes for normalcy in the Valley.
 - * In 2011, a four page report called Intra Kashmir Trade, jointly prepared by the Delhi-based IPCS, Conciliation Resources of London, and the Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, said cross border trade had proved it could be insulated from the ups and downs in the India-Pakistan relationship, and had begun to establish a "bottom up" approach to peace-building.
- Countries divided by temporary borders has now been patched by Trade, which has attracted divided families.
 - * More than its value in currency terms, the cross Loc trade holds much symbolic value in Jammu & Kashmir, especially in the Poonch-Rawalakot sector, where there are more divided families
 - * Therefore, It has provided a non-violent and alternative vision for change and conflict transformation

Implications

- Suspension of LoC trade is a poorly-thought move that shrinks the space for manoeuvre in Kashmir and with Pakistan
- The affected traders says that with uncertainty over the reopening of the trade, their livelihoods will be in jeopardy, along with those of loaders, transporters, retailers who are part of their trade, as well as their families, totalling 40,000-50,000 people.

- This they say will lead to small- and medium-scale traders being squeezed at both ends, and result in heavy losses particularly for the fruit business; the State is renowned for its apples and cherry crops.

Conclusion

- The government's concerns may be well-founded, but the solution to violations of a trade agreement is to enforce the rules stringently, not stop exchange of goods and put at risk the livelihood of countless people on both sides of the LoC
- The apprehensions that the trade across the two sides of Kashmir was being used by terrorist benamis or other unscrupulous elements, the better course of action would have been to monitor the crossing points at Uri and Chakkan da Bagh through which it was taking place four times a week.

5. Employment and Incomes Policy

Introduction

- The U.S. has begun trade skirmishes with India.
- It objects to India increasing import duties on electronic goods and wants India to reduce duties on U.S.-made motorcycles.
- Meanwhile the World Trade Organisation seems to be in the intensive care unit. It is time to apply fundamental principles to reshape a trade regime that is fair to all.

Hypothesis and debate on Free trade

- The macro-economic case for free trade is that if each person would do only what he or she does better than everyone else and all would trade with each other, everyone's welfare will increase. Also, the size of the global economic pie would be larger because there will be no inefficiencies.
- The problem is that, at present, many people in the world are doing what others, in other countries, can do better than them.
- To get to the economists' ideal state, many people will have to stop doing what they are doing and learn to do something else.
- Moreover, according to this theory, people should not start producing what others are already producing, because they will produce less efficiently until they learn to do it well.
- According to this theory of free trade, Indians should not have bothered to learn how to produce trucks, buses and two-wheelers when the country became independent. They should have continued to import them from American, European and Japanese companies.

Merits of Free Trade according to Free trade classicists

- They say that easy import of products from other countries increases consumer welfare.

- Consumers everywhere welcome a lowering of import barriers because it brings products into their shops they always wished for.
- Milton Friedman had observed that, in international trade, exports help companies and imports help citizens.
- Therefore, resistance to free trade does not come from consumers. It generally comes from companies which cannot compete
- Companies in less developed countries which are not able to compete until their country's infrastructure is improved and they have acquired sufficient capabilities, or even from companies in developed countries when producers in developing countries overtake them.

Income Generation by building Industrial Policy

- However, to benefit from easy imports, citizens need incomes to buy the products and services available.
- Therefore, they need jobs that will provide them adequate incomes.
- Any government responsible for the welfare of its citizens has to be concerned about the growth of jobs in the country.
- Domestic producers can provide jobs.
- Ergo, a developing country needs a good 'industrial policy' to accelerate the growth of domestic production, by building on its competitive advantages; and by developing those capabilities, it can compete with producers in countries that 'developed' earlier.

India's suffering in Manufacturing continues

- When the 'no barriers to free trade' movement went into overdrive with the Washington Consensus in the 1990s, the concept of 'industrial policy', which had become associated with the idea of 'protection' of domestic industries, became a taboo.
- The Washington Consensus is a set of 10 economic policy prescriptions considered to constitute the "standard" reform package promoted for crisis-ravaged developing countries by Washington, based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and United States Department of the Treasury.
- India liberalised imports in the 1990s and Indian consumers have benefited greatly since then from the variety of products available to them from around the world.
- However, by 2009, when the second United Progressive Alliance government was formed, the weakness of Indian manufacturing industries had become a great concern.
- The manufacturing sector in India and China had comparable capabilities in 1990.

- * By 2009, China's was 10 times larger than India's, and its capital goods production sector was 50 times larger.
- * Not only was the Indian market being flooded with Chinese hand-tools and toys, China was also selling high-tech electrical and telecommunication equipment to India (and around the world too).
- Signs were already visible then that India's impressive GDP growth was not generating enough employment for India's large youth population. Whereas India's economy should have been a powerful job generator, the employment elasticity of India's growth —
 - * The numbers of jobs created per unit of GDP growth — was among the lowest in the world.

Lessons India can learn from its own history

- With the government's insistence in the pre-liberalisation era that production and technology must be indigenised in phased manufacturing programmes, India's automobile sector was able to provide Indian consumers with good products.
 - * It now provides millions of people with employment and incomes in widespread domestic supply chains.
 - * Moreover, Indian auto-component producers and commercial vehicle producers export to the world's most competitive markets.
- In contrast, the Indian electronics sector has languished, while China's has flourished.
 - * India signed the Information Technology Agreement of WTO in 1996 and reduced import duties on IT-related manufactured products to zero.
 - * China withheld for some time until its electronic sector was stronger. Now the U.S. and Europe are trying to prevent China's telecom and electronic goods in their markets.

What should India do?

- By 2019, it has become clear that India's policy-makers must find a way for economic growth to produce more income-generating opportunities for Indian citizens.
- Employment and incomes are the most pressing issues for Indian citizens. Therefore, an ambitious 'Employment and Incomes Policy' must be the highest priority for the next government.
- If citizens earn more, they can spend more. The 'Employment and Incomes Policy' should guide the Industrial Policy to where investments are required, and also what is expected from those investments to produce more income-generating opportunities for young Indians.

- The scope of 'industry' must be broadened to include all sectors that can build on India's competitive advantages.
 - * For example, the tourism and hospitality industry, taking advantage of India's remarkable diversity of cultures and natural beauty, has the potential to support millions of small enterprises in all parts of the country.
 - * By building on India's competitive advantage of large numbers of trainable youth, and with digital technologies to increase the reach of small enterprises, manufacturing and services can provide many domestic and export opportunities that India has so far not seized.

Conclusion

- To conclude, the WTO's governance needs to be overhauled to promote the welfare of citizens in all countries, especially poorer ones, rather than lowering barriers to exports of companies in rich countries in the guise of free trade idealism.
- And Indian economists, distracted by the mathematics of universal basic incomes, should return to the fundamentals of economic growth — more opportunities to earn incomes from productive work with development of new capabilities.
- A robust 'Incomes and Employment Policy', supported by an imaginative Industrial Policy, must guide India's trade policy.

6. Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion

Context:

- Finance has been widely regarded as a powerful intervention to foster economic growth, and yet, as of 2017, roughly a third of the adults globally remain unbanked, down from nearly 50% in 2011
- What this suggests is a discernible gap between the availability of finance and relatedly, its use.

A look at Indian Stats

- 690 million adults were added into the fold of account holders between 2011 and 2017, the extent of financial inclusion—defined as an adult (aged 15 years and above) having an account at a formal financial institution or through a mobile money provider—stood at 80% in 2017, up from 35% in 2011.
- On average, 14% of Indian individuals saved at any financial institution in 2014, up just 2 percentage points since 2011. By 2017, although this increased to 20%, it was much lower than the global average of 27%.
- The picture is even starker when it comes to the use of formal credit with only 7% of individuals in India borrowing from a financial institution in 2017, lower than the global average of 11% and the lowest among the other Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) countries

Refining the financial inclusion mechanism by focusing on both Demand and Supply side

- Realizing the not-so-impressive progress of finance, policymakers have been continuously devising innovative ways to improve financial inclusion. Most policy measures thus far have focused on the supply-side, taking the demand-side as a status quo.
- However, after the global financial crisis, it is being increasingly recognised that any concerted attempt to promote financial inclusion would need to take a holistic view of the process, encompassing the demand-side as well.
- One area on the demand-side of the financial inclusion process that has gained currency is financial literacy. By now, there is persuasive evidence which suggests that adequate knowledge of basic economic concepts, such as interest rate compounding, inflation or financial risk diversification equips individuals to incur lower transaction fees, deleverage their outstanding debts and ensure lower interest outgo on loans
- Central banks stand out as institutions that are leading programmes on financial literacy.
 - * Consistent with this global trend, the Indian central bank has also undertaken significant steps to promote financial literacy of its population.
 - * A key initiative in this regard has been the establishment of Financial Literacy Centres (FLCs). Accordingly, beginning 2007, commercial banks were advised to set up FLCs on a pilot basis in the state/union territory under their jurisdiction

How were FLC's established?

- First, under the FLC module, each bank has been entrusted with the responsibility of acting as a sponsor bank for an allocated district within a state.
- Second, even within a state, there are instances where a FLC was established in a district and a contiguous one where it was not.

Under the stipulated guidelines, the lead bank was needed to set up FLCs with the key objectives of facilitating financial inclusion through provision of two essentials, that is, literacy and easy access, for disseminating information regarding the central bank and general banking concepts to the various target groups, and for providing education on financial planning and responsible borrowing, including debt counselling and insurance.

Examples from other countries

- Such policy focus on financial literacy is not unique to India. Several countries such as Russia, Belgium, Sweden and Turkey are implementing a national strategy for financial literacy.
- Others such as Czech Republic, Netherlands, Slovak Republic, Spain and the UK are revising their first national strategy for financial education based on the experience gained.

Results

- The establishment of FLCs does not exert any perceptible impact on access to bank account.
- During the initial days of the programme, awareness regarding the FLCs was limited.
- Besides, the FLCs were serving mostly walk-in clients; outdoor literacy drives were an exception. In addition, the literacy material available at the FLCs was primarily publicity material pertaining to various products of sponsor banks.
 - * As a result, the FLCs were not in a position to maintain arm's length distance from sponsor banks, negating the very efficacy of the scheme.
- FLCs established in urban areas exert a positive impact on the use of bank account.
 - * With experience changes were made by recognising the limitations of the initial training modules, the banks started preparing financial literacy material in vernacular languages using stories and pictorial representations, improving its appeal and accessibility to the respondents.
 - * The role of the financial counsellors was also streamlined, including improvements in staffing, resources and infrastructure, as well as their capacity-building. All these factors could explain the efficacy of the FLCs
- Establishment of the FLCs by sponsor banks with bigger branch network does not necessarily translate into financial inclusion, indicating that the physical branch infrastructure is not a necessary condition for improving financial inclusion.

Key Takeaway

- FLCs are more effective in influencing the use of accounts as compared with access.
- FLCs established by well-capitalised sponsor banks with low levels of problem loans are better equipped to ensure financial inclusion.
- In addition, the results also show that both traditional as well as non-traditional channels are able to improve financial inclusion, although their impact via FLCs is manifested at a later period.

Conclusions

By now, there is substantive evidence which suggests that financial literacy can improve the efficacy of financial decision-making. However, there is limited evidence as to whether better financial decision-making is manifested in improved financial outcomes.

- Financial literacy has played an important role in improving account activity, but its impact on the access to bank accounts has been less compelling.

- The growing efficacy of financial literacy during the latter stages suggests that addressing the impediments which plagued the process during the initial phase played an important role in furthering financial inclusion. It, therefore, becomes important to address the specific micro-level impediments that can further enhance its efficacy.
- While there is no gainsaying the growing importance of electronic channels towards acquiring financial literacy, the role of traditional channels such as bank agents highlights their importance in augmenting financial literacy.

7. Fixed Maturity Plan (FMP)

Context:

- Recently, investors in Fixed Maturity Plans (FMPs) of two fund houses were told that they may need to be a little flexible about receiving their maturity proceeds.
- Kotak Mutual Fund redeemed its FMPs series 127 and 183 on maturity date, paying back capital while deferring part of the returns to a later date, citing a delay in realisation of debt from the Essel group. It also informed its investors about four other FMPs with exposures to the Essel group and the troubled IL&FS Transportation Networks.
- HDFC Mutual Fund sought investors' consent for extending the term of its 2016 FMP series 1168D by another 380 days and told them that it could either defer returns or seek a roll-over for other FMPs due later.

What are fixed maturity plans?

- FMPs are closed-end debt funds with a maturity period that can range from one month to five years. Because debt funds enjoy long-term capital gains tax after three years, typically three-year FMPs are now popular. FMPs are predominantly debt-oriented, and their objective is to provide steady returns over a fixed-maturity period, thereby protecting investors from market fluctuations.

How do FMPs work?

- An FMP portfolio consists of various fixed-income instruments with matching maturities. Based on the tenure of the FMP, a fund manager invests in instruments in such a way that all of them mature around the same time. During the tenure of the plan, all the units of the plan are held until they mature on a specified date. Thus, investors get an indicative rate of return of the plan.

Where do FMPs invest?

- FMPs usually invest in certificates of deposits (CDs), commercial papers (CPs), money market instruments, non-convertible debentures over a defined investment tenure. Sometimes, they also invest in bank fixed deposits.

Are FMPs liquid?

- Since FMPs are closed-end funds, they can only be traded on the stock exchange where they are listed. However, trading in these units is negligible which makes FMPs illiquid. Compared to this, open-ended debt funds can be bought or sold on a daily basis.

Lessons from the fiasco:

The FMP crisis highlights three hitherto hidden risks in this product for investors.

- One, even FMPs that promise to maintain high-quality portfolios with AAA or A1 rated instruments aren't immune to default risks. The IL&FS default has shown that even AAA or A1 ratings from Indian rating agencies can be fallible. Therefore, ratings do not completely insulate you against credit risks.
- Two, FMPs can expose one to higher risks than open-end debt schemes by owning concentrated exposures in corporate bonds.
- Three, since they are close-ended and attract more retail than institutional investors, there is less scrutiny into the investing decisions of FMPs than into open-end funds. In open end-debt funds, institutional investors tend to protest risky exposures by exiting the fund, a facility which close-ended FMPs don't allow.

Conclusion:

- All these are reasons for avoiding FMPs as a class. However, it is a lesson for investors to stop thinking of FMPs as substitutes for bank deposits. Investors in ongoing FMPs must immediately check the portfolios of their schemes and watch out for any email communication from their fund houses on troubled bonds. Rolling over the fund, if given the choice, is your best bet though you may have to wait longer for your money.

8. Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR)

- It is a semiannual report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that assesses the stability of global financial markets and emerging-market financing.
- It is released twice per year, in April and October.
- The GFSR focuses on current conditions, especially financial and structural imbalances that could risk an upset in global financial stability and access to financing by emerging-market countries.
- It emphasizes the ramifications of financial and economic imbalances that are highlighted in one of the IMF's other publications, the World Economic Outlook.
- Topics covered in the GFSR usually include systemic risk assessments in worldwide financial markets, worldwide debt management, emerging economic markets and current economic crises that could affect finances worldwide.

- The Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR) replaced two previous reports by the IMF, the annual International Capital Markets Report and the quarterly Emerging Market Financing Report.

Context:

- April 2019 Global Financial Stability Report (GFSR) was released

On India

- The report said, there continues to be a high stock of non-performing assets (NPAs) in India, and there has been some progression.
 - * Steps taken by the authorities to boost capital buffers in banks and also governments in state-owned banks that have had some positive impact
- The level of capitalisation of some banks, particularly government-owned banks should be bolstered.

9. How to achieve 24x7 power for all

Introduction

- Almost every willing household in India now has a legitimate electricity connection. The household electrification scheme, Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or Saubhagya, has been implemented at an unprecedented pace. More than 45,000 households were electrified every day over the last 18 months.
- Against such an achievement, it is important to ask these questions: what did it take for India to achieve this target? Why is electricity access not only about provision of connections? And, how can we ensure 24x7 power for all?

Background

- The enactment of the Electricity Act, in 2003, and the introduction of the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana, in 2005, expanded electrification infrastructure to most villages in the following decade.
- But the rollout of the Saubhagya scheme, in 2017, gave the required impetus to electrify each willing household

Reasons for this surge

- Several engineers and managing directors in electricity distribution companies (discoms), their contractors, State- and Central-level bureaucrats, and possibly energy ministers have been working at fever pitch
- Discom engineers have evolved their attitude from procrastination to that of agility, from one of scepticism to that of determination
- Their efforts to meet targets have even made them walk through path of difficult terrain

Concerns

Despite such massive efforts, outreach by the Govt and its missionary, the battle against electricity is still not won. There is evidence to prove that stats are far from reality. The infrastructure laid is not working to its optimum level.

- The erection of electricity poles and an extension of wires do not necessarily mean uninterrupted power flow to households.
 - * There is gap between a connection and reliable power supply.
- While the median hours of supply increased from 12 hours in 2015 to 16 hours a day in 2018, it is still far from the goal of 24x7.
- Similarly, while instances of low voltage and voltage surges have reduced in the last three years, about a quarter of rural households still report low voltage issues for at least five days in a month.

Steps that needs to be taken

- First, India needs real-time monitoring of supply at the end-user level. We achieve what we measure. While the government is bringing all feeders in the country online, we currently have no provision to monitor supply as experienced by households.
 - * Only such granular monitoring can help track the evolving reality of electricity supply on the ground and guide discoms to act in areas with sub-optimal performance. Eventually, Smart Meters (that the government plans to roll out) should help enable such monitoring.
 - * However, in the interim, we could rely on Interactive Voice Response Systems (IVRS) and SMS-based reporting by end-users.
- Second, discoms need to focus on improving the quality of supply as well as maintenance services.
 - * Adequate demand estimation and respective power procurement will go a long way in reducing load shedding.
 - * Discoms need to identify novel cost-effective approaches to maintain infrastructure in these far-flung areas.
 - * Some States have already taken a lead in this. Odisha has outsourced infrastructure maintenance in some of its rural areas to franchisees, while Maharashtra has introduced village-level coordinators to address local-level challenges.
- Finally, the improvement in supply should be complemented with a significant improvement in customer service, which includes billing, metering and collection.

Conclusion

- Electricity is the driver for India's development.
- As we focus on granular monitoring, high-quality supply, better customer service and greater revenue realisation at the household level, we also need to prioritise electricity access for livelihoods and community services such as education and health care.
- Only such a comprehensive effort will ensure that rural India reaps the socio-economic benefits of electricity

10. INC22

- INC-22 required companies incorporated on or before December 31, 2017 to provide details regarding the location of their offices, directors, and proof of business.
- Companies have to upload a photo of the external profile of the registered office showing the nameplate, including CIN, registered address, e-mail and phone numbers, besides photos of the internal premises of the registered office.
- These photos must include at least one director who would also sign the form.
- The new e-form INC 22A, which is also known as e-Form ACTIVE (Active Company Tagging Identities and Verification), was notified as part of Companies (Incorporation) Amendment Rules, 2019.
- The deadline for submission of the form is April 25, 2019.

Context

- The Centre is likely to extend the deadline and relax the rules for the disclosure norms it had set for companies in an attempt to weed out shell companies according to officials in the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

Concerns Voiced by start Up's

- The start-up community in particular raised concerns about the form, saying that many of the requirements — including a photo of the exterior and interior of the office, and one with a director standing in front of the nameplate — were extremely onerous and unviable.
- The main problem, they said in a letter to Corporate Affairs, was that many start-ups operated out of co-working spaces. Hence, taking such photographs would be unviable.
- It is quite impractical as many operate from homes or shared spaces or a small space in a large corporate building,

11. India becomes net steel importer in 2018-19, first time in three years**Context:**

- India was a net importer of steel during the 2018-19 fiscal year, the first time in three years, as the country lost market share among its traditional steel buyers and imports jumped on demand for higher-quality steel domestically.

- The country's finished steel exports fell by 34% in the fiscal year that ended in March to 6.36 million tonnes, according to preliminary government data
- During the same period, finished steel imports rose 4.7% to 7.84 million tonnes.

Details

- India's exports during the fiscal year declined after rival steelmakers in China, Japan, South Korea and Indonesia, blocked from markets in the United States and Europe by tariffs and other protectionist measures
 - * They ate away at the country's markets in the Middle East and Africa
 - * Imports from the four Asian countries also climbed as they diverted supply into India
- Imports of value-added steel, primarily for the auto sector and high-end electrical steel were the biggest source of imports
- India's Ministry of Steel has urged local automakers to cut Japanese and South Korean imports to support domestic producers but the automakers say they cannot get the quality of steel they need locally.

12. Indian Accounting Standards (IndAS)**Introduction**

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs in 2011 had announced the applicability of Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) which would make the reporting of financials of Indian companies globally accessible. Following this MCA had notified Companies (Ind AS Rules) 2015 which had listed out the implementation of Ind AS in 4 phases
 - * Phase I - Listed and unlisted companies with net-worth of ₹ 500 crore (w.e.f FY17)
 - * Phase II - Remaining listed and unlisted companies with net-worth of ₹ 250 crore (w.e.f FY18)
 - * Phase III - Banks, NBFCs and insurance companies where net worth is more than or equal to ₹ 500 crore (w.e.f FY19)
 - * Phase IV - All NBFCs whose net worth is more than/ equal to ₹ 250 crore but less than ₹ 500 cr (w.e.f FY20)
- RBI recently has postponed the implementation of Ind AS for the banking sector indefinitely as the amendments to relevant law are yet to be made. This is the second time that RBI has postponed the implementation (it was done earlier in April 2018 citing pending amendments to Banking Regulation Act 1949 and preparedness of the banks).
- The Ind AS for Non-Banking Financial Companies(NBFC) has come into effect from last year

Structure

- GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) is a collection of commonly-followed accounting rules and standards for financial reporting.

- International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS): It is a set of accounting standards developed by an independent, not-for-profit organization called the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB).

Current Status

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

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

Details

- Ind AS or Indian Accounting Standards govern the way accounting is done and financial transactions are recorded and also how the statements such as profit and loss account and balance sheet are presented
- Indian companies use a different methodology of recording their transactions compared to the companies in other countries (which use IFRS - International Financial Reporting Standards). Despite the calls for the Indian companies to shift to the global methodology, the companies have resisted citing that there will be too many changes which will be introduced and this will lead to compliance issues and confusion. The concept of Ind AS has been introduced as a compromise between the two. Ind AS will harmonize the Indian accounting rules with that of IFRS
- The new rules are based on the IFRS 9 standards, which were created after the global financial crisis. If the rules were implemented then the banks would have been forced to recognize stressed assets which means that they will have to maintain an extra capital of ₹ 1.1 tn by the end of Q1FY20

- * Presently as per the guidelines issued by the central banker, the banks will start making provisions for the losses only when the loan repayment is defaulted for a specific period of time but under the proposed norms banks will have to calculate Expected Credit Losses (ECL) on their loans in each of the reporting periods and make adjustments to their profit-and-loss account even before a borrower may default on the repayments

Changes required

- The implementation of IndAS for public sector banks requires an amendment to the Banking Regulation Act.
- The schedule in BR Act relating to financial statement disclosures needs to be changed to the IndAS format
- Under the current rules, banks set aside money to cover loans that have turned bad.
 - * Under IndAS, they must make provisions after assessing the expected loss from the time a loan is originated rather than waiting for a trigger event.
 - * These norms, which are in line with international norms, the International Financial Reporting Standards, were designed to avoid credit shocks like those seen in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008.
- The changes will not only introduce the methodology of recording transactions, it will lead to certain changes in their profits/losses
 - * Intangible assets such as goodwill were earlier amortized but under Ind AS, these are considered to be having an indefinite life. Hence the profits of the companies having sizeable goodwill will increase
 - * The discounts given to consumers earlier were considered to be a part of marketing expenses but under Ind AS it will be deducted from the sales/revenue
 - * Excise duties earlier were deducted from the revenues/sales under Ind AS it will be kept under expenses

Significance

- Adoption of IFRS will be challenging but at the same time will be rewarding as well, since it is likely to result in improved comparability, transparency and quality of financial statements.
- For an investor in the stock market, these figures act as reference points

13. Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF)

Context:

- In a major success, the IEPF Authority has been able to enforce The Peerless General Finance and Investment Company Limited to transfer deposits worth about Rs 1514 Cr to IEPF.

About IEPF Authority:

- IEPF Authority has been set up under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India as a statutory body under Companies Act 2013 to administer the Investor Education and Protection Fund with the objective of promoting Investor's Education, Awareness and Protection.
- The Authority takes various initiatives to fulfil its objectives through Investor Awareness Programmes and various other mediums like Print, Electronic, Social Media, and Community Radio etc.
- The size of IEPF Fund has almost doubled within one year with an accumulated corpus of about Rs 4138 Cr. The companies have also transferred about 65.02 Cr valuing Rs 21,232.15 Cr.
- Secretary Ministry of Corporate Affairs is the Chairperson of the Authority. Joint Secretary Ministry of Corporate Affairs is the Chief Executive Officer of the Authority.

Background

- This depositor's money was pending with The Peerless General Finance and Investment Company Limited for the last 15 years.
- This amount was taken by the company by issuing about 1.49 Cr Deposit Certificates and include more than 1 Cr individual investors.
- The data submitted by the company reveals that 50.77 percent of the total amount was taken in the form of deposit certificates of the value of Rs. 2000 or less. Number wise such certificates form 85.32 percent of the total number of certificates issued.
- The majority of these investors are common citizens belonging to the lower and middle-income group including daily wage earners, etc.
- Geographically, the investors involved belong to 30 states and Union territories of the Country. Majority of the investors belong to the state of West Bengal.
- The Authority has also acted against companies that have transferred the unpaid dividend amount to IEPF but have failed to transfer shares in accordance with section 124(6) of the Act.
- In some other cases, the companies are showing unclaimed and unpaid amounts in their Balance Sheets but have not transferred such amounts to IEPF even after seven years. Based on the above, the authority has issued more than 4000 notices to the companies under section 206(4) of the Act for calling information.

14. Kandhamal Haldi

Context

- 'Kandhamal Haldi', a variety of turmeric indigenous to southern Odisha, has earned the Geographical indication (GI) tag

Details

- Kandhamal in Odisha's southern hinterland is famed for its turmeric, a spice that enjoys its pride of place in an array of cuisines.
- The agricultural product also stands out for its healing properties and arresting aroma.

15. Manganese Ore India Limited (MOIL)

- It is a miniratna state-owned manganese-ore mining company headquartered in Nagpur
- MOIL Limited, the largest producer of manganese ore in the country

16. NuGen Mobility Summit 2019

Context :

- The International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT) will organize a NuGen Mobility Summit, 2019, at Manesar

Details:

- The Summit is being organized in association with SAENIS, SAE INDIA, SAE International, NATRiP, DIMTS, Department of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, SIAM and ACMA.
- The objective of the Summit is to share new ideas, learnings, global experiences, innovations and future technology trends for faster adoption, assimilation and development of advanced automotive technologies for a smarter and greener future.
- This event will help in building a platform for bringing together all stakeholders in the automotive industry to understand global advancements in technologies.
- The event aims to bring together the automotive OEMs, professionals, researchers, academic experts, vehicle system suppliers, test equipment supplier, quality managers, product planners, component developers, SAE members and students from all over the world.
- Experts working with leading international scientific and research organizations and testing laboratories from various countries like USA, Europe, Japan and other Asian countries will also participate in the event and share their experiences and knowledge on the development of smart and green technologies and the challenges that the industry needs to overcome.

- Track demonstrations, drive-touch-feel activity and lab demonstrations on upcoming vehicle technologies like connected mobility, autonomous vehicles, electric mobility, alternate fuels, intelligent transportation system, hydrogen fuel cell, hydrogen IC engine, vehicle dynamics, advanced materials and lightweight, end of life vehicles and recycling are the uniqueness of this event.

What is ICAT?

- ICAT stands for The International Centre for Automotive Technology.
- ICAT Manesar is a division of NATRIP Implementation Society (NATIS) under the Department of Heavy Industries, Government of India.
- It provides services for testing, validation, design and homologation of all categories of vehicles and has a mission to assist the automotive industry in adopting cutting edge technologies in vehicle evaluation and component development to ensure reliability, durability and compliance to the current and future regulations in new generation mobility solutions.
- ICAT Centre-II is under brisk renovation to create a world-class state-of-the-art facility for organizing such significant and sizeable events for the automotive fraternity. Several kinds of tracks such as coast down the track, oval track, abs track, hill tracks, and flood track will be available for demonstrations and events.

17. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna (PMUY)

Introduction

- In India, the poor have limited access to cooking gas (LPG). The spread of LPG cylinders has been predominantly in the urban and semi-urban areas with the coverage mostly in middle class and affluent households. But there are serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuels.
- According to WHO estimates, about 5 lakh deaths in India alone due to unclean cooking fuels.
- Most of these premature deaths were due to non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer.
- Indoor air pollution is also responsible for a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses in young children.
- According to experts, having an open fire in the kitchen is like burning 400 cigarettes an hour.

Details

- It is a scheme of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas for providing LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.
- The Scheme provides a financial support of Rs 1600 for each LPG connection to the BPL households, interest free loan to purchase stove and refill by Oil Marketing Companies.

Target beneficiaries

- Under the scheme, five crore LPG connections are to be provided to BPL households. The identification of eligible BPL families will be made in consultation with the State Governments and the Union Territories.
- BPL is a person/ household who suffers from at least one deprivation under the Socio-Economic Caste census (SECC) - 2011 (Rural) Database.
- Release of LPG connection under this Scheme shall be in the name of the women belonging to the BPL family.

Significance

- Providing LPG connections to BPL households will ensure universal coverage of cooking gas in the country.
- This measure will empower women and protect their health. It will reduce drudgery and the time spent on cooking.
- It will also provide employment for rural youth in the supply chain of cooking gas

Context

- According to a new study from the Research Institute for Compassionate Economics (r.i.c.e) shows that 85% of Ujjwala beneficiaries in rural Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan still use solid fuels for cooking, due to financial reasons as well as gender inequalities.

Details

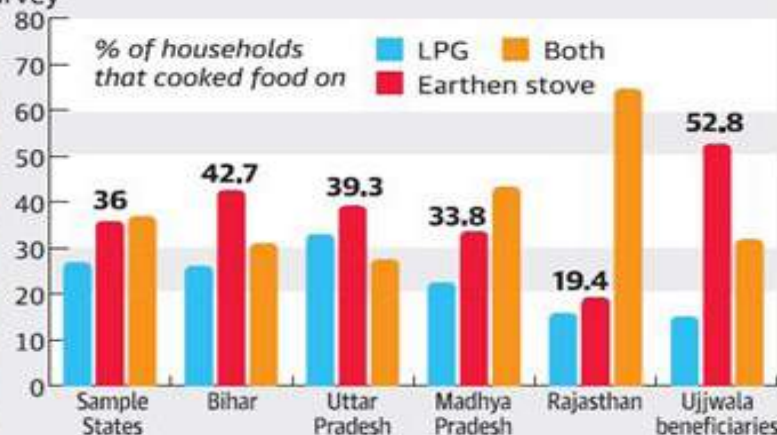
- Ujjwala beneficiaries are poorer, on average, than households who got LPG on their own. Refilling the cylinder is a greater fraction of their monthly consumption, and they may be less likely to get a refill immediately after a cylinder becomes empty,
 - * Surveyors found that almost 70% of households do not spend anything on solid fuels, meaning that the relative cost of an LPG cylinder refill, even if subsidised, is far higher.
 - * Women are more likely to make dung cakes, and while men are more likely to cut wood, women are often the ones collecting and carrying it.
- Most of the survey respondents agreed that it was easier to cook on a gas stove, but felt that food cooked on the chulha — especially rotis — was tastier.
- Eating food cooked on gas causes gas [in the stomach]
- More than 86% felt that cooking on the chulha was better for the health of those eating, reflecting ignorance

Concerns

- The resultant indoor air pollution can lead to infant deaths and harm child development, as well as contribute to heart and lung disease among adults, especially the women, cooking on these chulhas.

Awareness falling short

Only 27% of households in the sample States reported exclusively using liquefied petroleum gas to cook food a day before the survey



2018 Survey of rural sanitation and solid fuel use | Gupta-Vyas et al 2019, Persistence of solid fuel use in rural north India

18. RBI sells entire stake in NHB, NABARD to govt

Context

- The Reserve Bank has exited the National Housing Bank (NHB) and the National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD), by selling its entire stakes to government for Rs 1,450 crore and Rs 20 crore, respectively, making them fully government-owned now.

Details

- The move is part of ending the cross-holding in regulatory institutions and
- It follows the recommendation of second Narasimham committee report of October 2001 and the RBI's own discussion paper on the same entitled 'Harmonizing the role and operations of development financial institutions and banks.'
- The Narasimham panel had said RBI could not own those entities which are regulated by it.
- The current change in the capital structure of both these financial institutions was brought in by the government through amendments to the Nabard Act of 1981 and the NHB Act of 1987

How much did RBI hold?

- Divestment of the RBI's shareholding in NABARD was done in two phases.
 - * The RBI held 72.5 per cent of equity in Nabard amounting to Rs 1,450 crore out of which 71.5 per cent amounting to Rs 1,430 crore was divested in October 2010 based on the government notification on September 16, 2010.
 - * The residual holding was divested on February 26, 2019.
- The RBI held 100 per cent shareholding in NHB, which was divested on March 19, 2019.

NABARD

- The NABARD came into existence in 1982, by transferring the agricultural credit functions of RBI and refinance functions of the then Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation.

NHB

- The decision to establish NHB was announced in the 1987-88 Budget.
- The National Housing Policy of 1988 envisaged setting up of NHB as the apex level institution for promoting the housing sector.

19. RBI's February 12 circular

- The circular completely revamped the rules tackling Non-Productive Assets (NPAs).
- It came at a time the banking sector's profitability was taking a hit, bad loans has spiralled to a whopping Rs 10 lakh crore, and the PNB scam was beginning to unravel.
- Under the new framework, the apex bank discontinued programmes for banks to restructure their defaulted loans such as corporate debt restructuring (CDR), sustainable structuring of stressed assets (S4A), strategic debt restructuring (SDR), among others, and made the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code as the main tool to deal with defaulters.
- The framework made it mandatory for banks to identify signs of incipient stress in loan accounts and classify stressed assets as Special Mention Account (SMA), immediately on default.
- The circular prohibited loan restructuring and asked banks to declare a company a non-performing asset (NPA) even if there was a day's delay in loan repayment.
 - * Even a single day's default in debt servicing would require reporting to the RBI and implementation of Resolution Plan.

Steps to be taken by bank

- Furthermore, lenders were asked to finalise a resolution plan in case of a default on large accounts of Rs 2,000 crore and above within 180 days, failing which insolvency proceedings would be invoked against the defaulter.
- Banks, too, would face penalties in case of failure to comply with the guidelines.
- Significantly, the RBI asked lenders to weekly report credit information, including classification of an account as special mention account (SMA) to the Central Repository of Information on Large Credits (CRILC) on all borrowers having an aggregate exposure of Rs 5 crore and above.\

Supreme Court Judgment

- The Supreme Court struck down the Reserve Bank of India's Feb. 12 circular on defaulting companies, calling it illegal
- The February 12 circular had attempted to lay down a rule-based stressed asset framework which asked banks to resolve stress in large accounts within 180 days or refer them for insolvency proceedings.
- The Supreme Court struck down the circular on grounds that the law permits the regulator to give directions to banks on stressed assets only upon the central government's authorisation and in case of a specific default.
 - * Whereas the circular applied to all stressed assets and was not accompanied by any specific government authorisation.

Significance

- The order will help power plants which are under stress due to lack of power purchase agreements
- Banks have more time to finish the resolution process, and there is scope under the inter-creditor agreement

Concerns raised after Judgment

- The voiding of the February 12, 2018 circular could slow down and complicate the resolution process for loans aggregating to as much as ₹3.80 lakh crore across 70 large borrowers, according to data from the ratings agency ICRA.
- The circular was aimed at breaking the nexus between banks and defaulters, both of whom were content to evergreen loans under available schemes.
- RBI data prove the circular had begun to impact resolution positively.
 - * It is this credit discipline that risks being compromised now.

Exceptions could have been given

- It is true that the circular failed to take into account the peculiarities of specific industries or borrowers and came up with a one-size-fits-all approach.

- It is also true that not all borrowers were deliberate defaulters, and sectors such as power were laid low by externalities beyond the control of borrowers.

The RBI could have addressed these concerns when banks and borrowers from these sectors brought these issues to its notice.

Way forward

- The RBI should study the judgment closely, and quickly reframe its guidelines so that they are within the framework of the powers available to it under the law. Else, the good work done in debt resolution in the last one year will be undone.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. AUSINDEX

What's in the news?

- The Australian and Indian Navy have concluded a two-week long bilateral maritime exercise code-named AUSINDEX on 14th Apr 2019.
- Personnel from the Eastern Fleet bid farewell to Her Majesty's Australian Ships Canberra, Newcastle, Paramatta and Success with a promise to meet again.
- The current edition of the exercise had the participation of the highest number of units thus far with four frontline ships with integral helicopters, one submarine and a variety of aircraft including P8I and P8A long-range Maritime Reconnaissance Anti-Submarine Warfare aircraft took part from both navies.
- For the first time, 55 American and 20 New Zealand military personnel embarked onboard the RAN ships and witnessed the exercises during AUSINDEX-19.
- The third edition of the exercise included a series of advanced warfare drills in all three dimensions comprising anti-submarine warfare exercises, air defense exercises, anti-surface warfare exercises including live-fire drills, replenishment at sea, and cross deck flying.
- The bilateral exercise was aimed "to strengthen and enhance mutual cooperation and interoperability between the IN and RAN, providing opportunities for interaction and exchange of professional views between the personnel of the two navies".

Editorial Analysis:

- Under the joint naval exercise known as AUSINDEX, one witnessed the largest ever peacetime deployment of Australian defence assets and personnel to India.
- It builds on a fourfold increase in the defence engagement between the two countries— from 11 defence exercises, meetings and activities in 2014 to 38 in 2018.
- The Indian Navy's Eastern Naval Command hosted an impressive array of high-end Australian military hardware, including the Royal Australian Navy's flagship, HMAS Canberra and the submarine, HMAS Collins.

A Brief Note on the HMAS Canberra:

- The Canberra is the size of a small aircraft carrier. She can carry over 1,000 troops and 16 helicopters. These vessels were joined by frigates, aircraft and around 1,200 sailors, soldiers and airmen and women.

Unique Element of AUSINDEX:

- This was Australia's largest defence deployment to India, the exercise was the most complex ever carried out between the defence forces of Australia and India.

- For the first time, our navies undertook anti-submarine warfare exercises. And in a similar show of trust and cooperation, Indian and Australian maritime patrol P-8 aircraft flew coordinated missions over the Bay of Bengal.

A Mark of greater alignment:

- The strategic trust on display during AUSINDEX is representative of a deepening strategic alignment between Australia and India.
- When Australia's Foreign Minister, Marise Payne, visited 2019, she emphasised the shared outlook that Australia and India have as free, open and independent democracies, as champions of international law, as supporters of an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and as firm believers that 'might is not right'. These shared values underline the deepening cooperation which Australia and India have.

Scope for Partnership:

- A key element of Australia's Indo-Pacific strategy is partnering with India in the vibrant Indian Ocean Region.
- India is a leader in this region and Australia is a natural partner for addressing shared challenges.
- Australia and India must continue to work together to combat transnational crime, terrorism, people smuggling, and illegal fishing, in order that we may all enjoy a peaceful and prosperous Indian Ocean Region.
- As the nation with one of the longest Indian Ocean coastlines and with more than 50% goods trade departing Indian Ocean ports, Australia is committed to addressing humanitarian and environmental challenges in the Indian Ocean neighbourhood.
- Australia is playing its part in the Indo-Pacific region through major new initiatives in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.
- Australia is undertaking a substantial step up in its support for Pacific Island countries.
- In November 2018, Australia announced the Australian Infrastructure Financing Facility for the Pacific. This AU\$2 billion initiative will boost Australia's support for infrastructure development in Pacific countries.
- Indo-Australian security relationships with Pacific Island countries have also been enhanced. The Australian Government plans to establish a Pacific Fusion Centre to provide real-time surveillance data for countries across the region as well as enhancing policing and military training both bilaterally and through regional centres.

- Australia and India are also building on its significant diplomatic and economic relationships with Southeast Asia to build resilience and prosperity in the region. India and Australia recently announced the Southeast Asia Economic Governance and Infrastructure Initiative, worth AU\$121 million, which will help unlock Southeast Asia's next wave of economic growth.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that all this activity is happening against the backdrop of a rapidly expanding India-Australia relationship.
- Our people-to-people and economic links are on the rise. The Indian diaspora in Australia is both strong and growing. One in 50 Australians today was born in India; almost 90,000 Indian students studied in Australia last year (2018); and over 350,000 tourists visited Australia from India in 2018.
- Australia and India are working together to see India become a top three trading partner for Australia by 2035.
- So, on the one hand, we should welcome the successful AUSINDEX exercise as a step up in our strategic partnership. At the same time, we should recognise it also as the natural next step in a friendship between Australia and India that is marked by growing trust, understanding and camaraderie. That is really something to celebrate.

2. Algeria shows the forces of the Arab Spring are still alive

Introduction

- "The task of men of culture and faith," said Albert Camus in Algiers in 1956, "is not to desert historical struggles nor to serve the cruel and inhuman elements in those struggles. It is rather to remain what they are, to help man against what is oppressing him, to favour freedom against the fatalities that close in upon it." This speech was given in order to save the lives of countless civilians, Arabs and French alike. For Camus, the main idea was to hold tight to the moral compass, resisting oppression while resisting one's own tendency to oppress. Camus proposed that the FLN (National Liberation Front) and French authorities agree to a "civilian truce".

Abdelaziz Bouteflika Resigns

- The popular uprisings that swept the Arab world in 2011 had no immediate effect on Algeria.
- Algerians and analysts of Algeria talk about a "Second Arab Spring", challenging the traditional ideas of power in Algerian society and developing a new idea of democracy in the Maghreb.

- Unlike in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, the political power of FLN in Algeria has remained intact. Under the pressure of the Algerian youth and civil society, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had been the president since 1999, is now out of the picture. Following several weeks of intense demonstrations by artists, intellectuals, students, lawyers and many other representatives of the Algerian civil society

Events that led to this plight

- The proceedings in Algeria arrive at a difficult moment for the country's economy.
- Algeria is facing double-digit unemployment, widespread corruption and a quarter of the population is living below the poverty line.
- As for the political situation, the regime has restricted human rights and civil liberties since the civil war of the 1990s,

Impact on the world

- Algeria's 42 million population is second only to Egypt's in the Arab world.
- It is an OPEC member, a major gas supplier to Europe, and a large importer of goods ranging from automobiles to pharmaceuticals.
- Protracted uncertainty in Algeria can affect Europe by disrupting energy supplies, and causing a surge in immigration and in radicalisation of the four million Algerians living in Europe.

Link to India

- For India, too, Algerian developments have multiple significance.
- First, Mr. Bouteflika was a friend of India and paid a state visit in 2001. His successor will, hopefully, continue the bilateral amity.
- Second, bilateral economic ties are robust and growing. Algeria is an important market for India's foodstuff, automobiles, farm machinery, pharmaceuticals, mobiles and cosmetics. It is also India's source for strategic commodities, especially hydrocarbons and phosphates.
- A number of Indian contractors have been active in Algeria, notably Larsen & Toubro, which recently won a \$1 billion hydrocarbon project from Sonatrach, the national oil company.
- At the political level, Algeria has been one of the few members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to have consistently supported India's case against terrorism.

Conclusion

- India can play a vital role in ensuring that Algeria's imminent socio-political transition is smooth by helping the country with institution-building and infrastructure.

Arab Spring 2.0?

- It is important to note that when protests broke out in Tunisia in late 2010 and spread to other countries, there were hopes that the Arab world was in for massive changes.
- The expectation was that in countries where people rose, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Syria, the old autocracies would be replaced with new democracies.
- However, except Tunisia, the country-specific stories of the Arab uprising were tragic.
- These tragedies, however, did not kill the revolutionary spirit of the Arab youth, as the protests in Sudan and Algeria show.
- Rather, there's continuity from Tunis to Khartoum and Algiers.

Arab Spring: Taking a Look Back

- It is important to note that the Arab uprising was originally triggered by a combination of factors. These factors are outlined as below:
 - * The economic model based on patronage was crumbling in these countries.
 - * The rulers had been in power for decades, and there was popular longing for freedom from their repressive regimes.
 - * More important, the protests were transnational in nature, though the targets of the revolutionaries were their respective national governments.
 - * The driving force behind the protests was a pan-Arabist anger against the old system. That's why it spread like wildfire from Tunis to Cairo, Benghazi and Manama. They may have failed to reshape the Arab political order, but the embers of the uprisings appear to have survived the tragedy of 'Arab Spring'.

Fertile Ground now?

- It is important to note that most Arab economies are beset with economic woes.
- The rentier system Arab monarchs and dictators built is in a bad shape.
- Arab rulers for years bought loyalty of the masses in return for patronage, which was then buttressed by the fear factor. This model is no more viable.
- If Arab countries were shaken by the 2010-11 protests, they would be thrown into another crisis in 2014, with the fall in oil prices. Having touched \$140 a barrel in 2008, the price of oil collapsed to \$30 in 2016. This impacted both oil-producing and oil-importing countries.
- Producers, reeling under the price fall, had cut spending — both public spending and aid for other Arab countries.

- Further, non-oil-producing Arab economies such as Jordan and Egypt saw aid that they were dependent on drying up. In May 2018, there were massive protests in Jordan against a proposed tax law and rising fuel prices. Demonstrators left the streets only after Prime Minister Hani Mulki resigned, his successor withdrew the legislation and King Abdullah II made an intervention to freeze the price hike.

Regime changers:

- In Sudan and Algeria, protesters have gone a step ahead, demanding regime change, like their comrades in Egypt and Tunisia did in late 2010 and early 2011.
- Algeria, whose economy is heavily dependent on the hydrocarbon sector, took a hit after the post-2014 commodity meltdown.
- Further, while GDP growth slowed from 4% in 2014 to 1.6% in 2017, youth unemployment soared to 29%.
- This economic downturn was happening at a time when Mr. Bouteflika was missing from public engagement. A stroke had paralysed him in 2013. But when he announced candidacy for this year's presidential election, seeking another five-year term, it infuriated the public.
- In a matter of days, protests spread across the country, which culminated in his resignation on April 2, 2019.
- Sudan's case is not different. The northeast African country is also battling a serious economic crisis. Mr. Bashir and his military clique ruled the country through fear for three decades.
- However, the split of South Sudan in 2011, with three-fourths of the undivided country's oil reserves, broke the back of the junta.
- Post-2014, Sudan fell into a deeper crisis, often seeking aid from richer Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and even Qatar, the Saudi bloc's regional rival.
- Inflation is at 73%. Sudan is also grappling with fuel and cash shortages.
- Discontent first boiled over in the northeastern city Atbara in mid-December over the rising price of bread, and the protests soon spread into a nationwide movement.
- Bashir tried everything he could to calm the streets — from declaring a state of emergency to sacking his entire cabinet — but protesters demanded nothing less than regime change. Finally the army stepped in, removing him from power.

Counter-revolutionaries:

- Like in the case of 2010-11, the 2018-19 protests are also transnational — they spread from Amman to Khartoum and Algiers in a matter of months.

- The pan-Arabist anger against national governments remains the main driving force behind the protests, which should set alarm bells ringing across Arab capitals. But in all these countries, the counter-revolutionary forces are so strong that protesters often stop short of achieving their main goal — a clear break with the past. They manage to get rid of the dictators, but the system those dictators built survives somehow, and sometimes in a moral brutal fashion. There are two main counter-revolutionary forces in these countries. The first are the main guardians of the old system, either the monarchy or the army. Tunisia is the only country where the revolutionaries outwitted the counter-revolutionaries. They overthrew Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's dictatorship, and the country transitioned to a multi-party democracy. In Egypt, the army made a comeback and further tightened its grip on the state and society through violence and repression. In Jordan, the monarch always acts as a bulwark against revolutionary tendencies.
- The second are geopolitical actors. In Libya, the foreign intervention removed Muammar Qaddafi, but the war destroyed the Libyan state and institutions, leaving the country in the hands of competing militias.
- Libya is yet to recover from the anarchy triggered by the intervention.
- In Syria, with foreign intervention, the protests first turned into an armed civil war and then the country itself became a theatre of wars for global players.
- In Yemen, protests turned into a sectarian civil conflict, with foreign powers taking different sides.
- In Bahrain, Saudi Arabia made a direct military intervention, on behalf of its rulers, to violently end the protests in Manama's Pearl Square.
- The same could happen in Algeria and Sudan as well. In both countries, the army let the Presidents fall, but retained its grip on power, despite pressure from protesters. They don't want regime change. They are dressing up the fall of the dictator as a revolution and selling it to the protesters, just as the Egyptian military did eight years ago.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts point out that currently, Sudan faces the heat of geopolitical intervention as well.
- As soon as the military council directly took power, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Egypt offered support to the military, at a time when protests continue in Khartoum demanding an immediate handover of power to a civilian government. The Saudis have also announced an aid package to the new junta, making it clear who they prefer.
- This is the challenge before the Arab protesters. They are angry. They want the system to be changed. But they are the multitudes. There's no vanguard of the revolution. While they keep rising up against the system, they are constantly being pushed back by the counter-revolutionaries.

3. Bold Kurukshetra

- It is military exercise between India and Singapore
- The joint training focused on developing interoperability and conduct of joint tactical operations in mechanized warfare.
- The troops learnt about each other's organisations and best practices being followed in combat

4. BRI

- The One Belt One Road (OBOR), also called the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is a multi-billion dollar project focused on improving connectivity and cooperation among countries in Asia, Africa, China and Europe.
- Experts opine that there are at least five reasons why India should have sent an observer to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Forum that begins in Beijing on April 25, 2019.

These reasons are as below:

1. Firstly, the defining feature of the 21st century is that Asia, not China, is at the centre of the world. The BRI is part of a transformation triggered by colonialism and industrial capitalism from the 1840s and influenced by the UN institutions and global rules from the 1950s.

- Of the estimated \$30 trillion increase in middle-class consumption growth estimated by 2030, only \$1 trillion is expected to come from Western economies and most of the rest from Asia.
- China's population is nearly one-third of the total population of Asia but by 2050, its population of working age will shrink by 200 million people while in India the working-age population will increase by 200 million.
- Asians are not subscribing to a "China-led Asia", which would imply returning to the colonial order.

2. Secondly, the global spread of the BRI signals the political end of the old order where the G7 shaped the economic agenda.

- China Recently, Italy, which is a member of the G7, is joining the BRI, despite the publicly voiced objection of the U.S., just as Britain joined the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015.
- Furthermore, Asians are gravitating to the new as it better meets their needs, not because the old is crumbling.

3. Thirdly, the Asian Development Bank, not China, drew global attention to infrastructure as the key driver of economic growth in Asia and the financing gap of \$26 trillion.

- Experts point out that the most visible feature of the BRI is the network of physical and digital infrastructure for transport, energy transmission and communications, harmonised with markets for advanced manufacturing and innovation-based companies.

- It is also important to note that two-thirds of the countries funded by the initiative have sovereign debt ratings below investment grade, and their being part of supply chains is a catalyst for growth.
 - As a matter of fact, a recent analysis identified only eight out of 68 countries at risk of debt default, which does not affect the overall viability of the \$3 trillion reserves of China for potential investment.
 - Further, there are cases of excess debt, political corruption and policy shifts following change in governments but overall the BRI remains popular. For example, Nepal has just chosen the Chinese gauge over the Indian one for its rail network.
4. Fourthly, the BRI, faced with criticism over lack of transparency and insensitivity to national concerns, is evolving towards standards of multilateralism, including through linkages with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- The International Monetary Fund describes it as a “very important contribution” to the global economy and is “in very close collaboration with the Chinese authorities on sharing the best international practices, especially regarding fiscal sustainability and capacity building”.
 - China is now also seeking co-financing with multilateral institutions as well as private capital for a Silk Road Bond.

5. Fifthly, for the BRI to have strategic objectives is not unusual. The Marshall Plan in the 1950s also required recipients to accept certain rules for deepening trade and investment ties with the U.S.

Thus, Chinese control over supply-chain assets like ports provides the ability to project naval power, which will however remain minuscule compared to that of the U.S. — comprising 800 overseas bases.

Having said that, the BRI's commercial advantage has certainly increased China's international weight and India needs to shape the new standards to benefit Indian technology companies.

The Way Forward: How India should act?

- Experts point out that India's China dilemma, as it ends its ambivalence towards China, revolves around assessment of the extent the Asian giants need each other for the Asian century.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has declared a cooperative vision of the 'Indo-Pacific', contrary to the containment-based view of the United States.
- China also recognises the difficulties inherent in the interlinked international and domestic agenda of the BRI, and needs India's support for reform of global governance, which was an important part of discussion at Wuhan.
- India should respond to the strategic complexity arising from the BRI, a key part of which cuts through Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, through three related but distinct diplomatic initiatives.

These related but distinct diplomatic initiatives are as below:

- Firstly, India needs to highlight that a British-led coup by the Gilgit Scouts led to Pakistani occupation of this territory and seek appropriate text recognising India's sovereignty — a drafting challenge but not an insurmountable one.
- Secondly, India should give a South Asian character to the two BRI corridors on India's western and eastern flanks, by linking them with plans for connectivity in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region.
- Thirdly, India needs work towards 'multilateralising' the BRI with a set of rules.

India's concerns

- India has been raising concern over the BRI's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as it is being built through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- The 3,000-km CPEC is aimed at connecting China and Pakistan with rail, road, pipelines and optical fibre cable networks.
- India too cautioned specially the neighboring countries about debt traps.
- India boycotted the first BRF meet held in 2017 as Beijing went ahead with the CPEC with Pakistan.
- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told an annual media briefing recently that the BRF meeting to be held in April, 2019 would be bigger than that in 2017 with more international participation.
- Wang refuted the criticism from the US, India and several other countries that the BRI is driving smaller countries in debt traps.
- The BRI is not a “debt trap” that some countries may fall into but an “economic pie” that benefits local population, Wang claimed.

5. India may stop oil imports from Iran

Context

- Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said the country plans to increase imports from major oil producing nations other than Iran, indicating that it will be acceding to the U.S. plan to reduce Iran's oil exports to zero

Details

- The U.S. announced that it would be cancelling the waivers from sanctions it had granted eight countries, including India, allowing them to import oil from Iran. Following the revocation of this waiver, any country violating the ban would face U.S. sanctions.
- The U.S. has made it clear that Indian companies that continue to import oil from Iran would face severe secondary sanctions, including being taken out of the SWIFT international banking system and a freeze on dollar transactions and U.S. assets.

- The shortfall will be made from alternate supply sources available in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Mexico.

Stats

- India was the second biggest buyer of Iranian crude oil after China.
- It bought some 24 million tonnes of crude oil from Iran in the fiscal ended March 31 (2018-19). Iran supplied more than a tenth of its oil needs.
- Iran in 2017-18 was its third-largest supplier after Iraq and Saudi Arabia and meets about 10 per cent of total needs.

India Iran relations could come under stress

- India has, in effect, now decided to cave in to U.S. pressure on the issue less than a year after External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said that India would recognise only UN sanctions, not “unilateral” ones.
- India is heavily involved in building the Chabahar port in southern Iran. This port is expected to become a major access route for India not only to Iran but also to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing hostile Pakistani territory.
- Tehran is also important for New Delhi in the context of Afghanistan as both are unequivocally opposed to the Pakistan-supported Taliban returning to power even in a power-sharing arrangement.
- Furthermore, Iran shares India's antipathy toward Pakistan, which it considers Washington's proxy and Saudi Arabia's ally.
- India's decision to stop importing oil from Iran at America's behest could drive a wedge between New Delhi and Tehran that will be very difficult to repair and cost India strategically.

Other Concerns

- The big concern is that the substitute crude suppliers — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Nigeria and the US — do not offer the attractive options that Iran does, including 60-day credit, and free insurance and shipping.
- In the larger picture, India isn't just testing its traditional ties with Iran, but also giving in to President Donald Trump's blatant bullying after his administration withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal.
- During 2016-17, India imported oil at \$47.6 a barrel. At current prices, India will have to spend at least \$70 per barrel, which implies an annual outgo of an extra \$30 billion.
 - * It will damage the country's trade balance, and may force the government to bring back subsidies on petroleum products, such as diesel and petrol, as it happened from 2004-14. This can also throw India's fiscal and trade deficit out of control.

- Rupee: The currency could be impacted if the trade and current account deficits were to widen. An increase in the import bill will tend to put pressure on the rupee.
- The projected drop in Iranian exports could further squeeze supply in a tight market — given the US has also sanctioned Venezuela, and the OPEC and allied producers including Russia have voluntarily cut output, which has pushed up oil prices more than 35% this year.

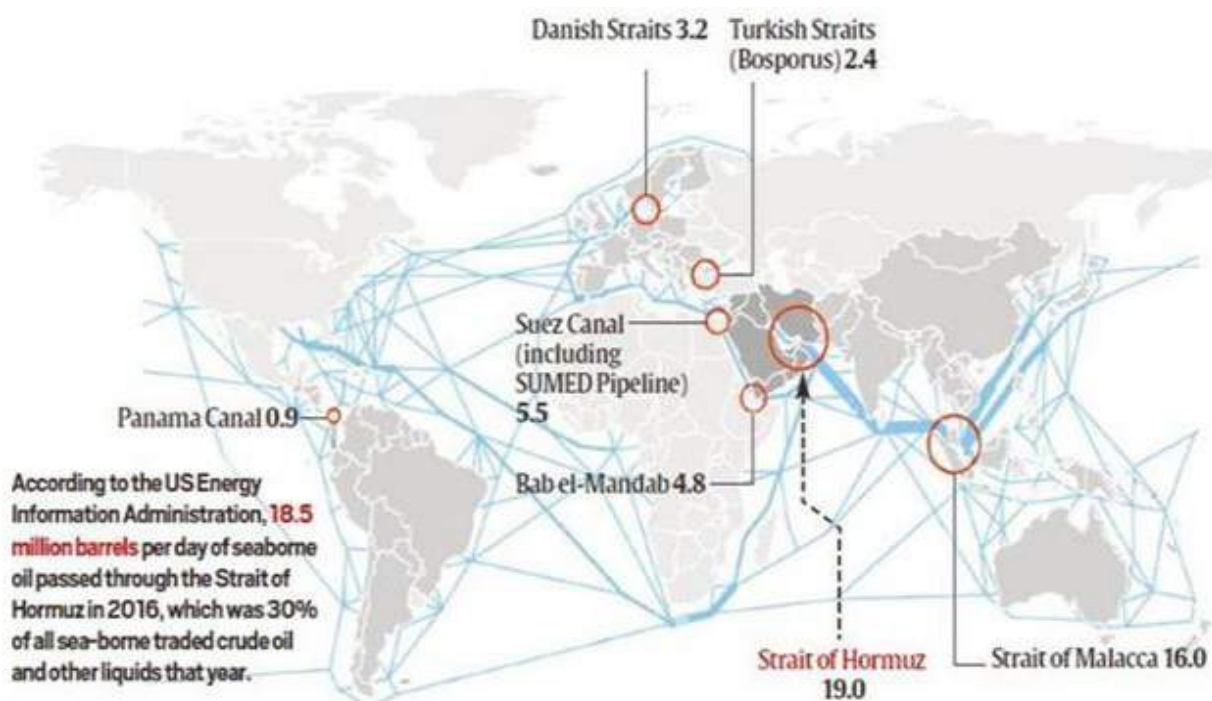
Will Iran turn more hostile?

- Iran has stood up to unprecedented sanctions for four decades and remained unbowed.
- The current American policy of forcing Tehran to cut its oil exports to zero will only aid Iranian hardliners and end up with Tehran adopting an even more virulent anti-American posture, further impeding the realisation of American strategic objectives in the region.
- While this confrontationist policy may please Israel and Saudi Arabia, it can well become a prelude to another major war in West Asia.
- Pushed to the wall by its inability to export oil in sufficient quantities, Iran is likely to retaliate by withdrawing from the nuclear accord and resuming full-scale nuclear enrichment close to weapon grade-level.
- This could lead to either an American and/or Israeli air and missile strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.
 - * Such attacks are bound to invite Iranian retaliation against American targets in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan and around the Gulf, either through proxies or directly. Iranian retribution is likely to include air strikes against Saudi and Emirati targets as well and concerted efforts to block the Straits of Hormuz.

Strait of Hormuz: world's most critical oil choke point

After the US said it would prevent five of Iran's biggest customers — including India — from buying its oil, Tehran threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, a neck of water between its southern coast and the northern tip of the sultanate of Oman, and the lane through which a third of the world's seaborne oil passes every day. It is a threat that Iran has made earlier, too — and this strategic area has seen several flashpoints erupt in Tehran's fraught relationship with the West over the years.

- Blocking them can lead to huge increases in energy costs and world energy prices.
- Choke points are also the places where tankers are most vulnerable to pirates, terrorist attacks, political unrest, war, and shipping accidents.



- Iran cannot legally close the waterway unilaterally because part of it is in Oman's territorial waters
 - * However, ships pass through Iranian waters, which Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Navy controls
- Annual war games by Iran involve missile tests. The Guards have warned that the security of the US and US interests are in Iranian hands
- The US fifth fleet in Bahrain protects commercial shipping in the area. The US has said closing the Hormuz Strait would amount to crossing a "red line"
- Massive stakes give Iran leverage, but closing the Hormuz Strait will amount to an escalation with unknown fallout — this is one reason Iran has, in 40 years of hostility with the West, never yet acted on its threats to close the Strait.

How would China react?

- China, one of the largest importers of Iranian oil, is likely to defy the American demand because as a great power and potential challenger to U.S. hegemony it will not want to be seen as bowing to American pressure.
- Furthermore, Beijing is firmly opposed to unilateral sanctions, as it fears that one day it may be subjected to similar treatment.

Turkey's Response

- Turkey and Iran have overlapping strategic interests regarding Kurdish secessionism, the territorial integrity of Iraq, and shared antipathy towards Saudi Arabia.
- Iran is the second largest supplier of energy to Turkey and a leading trading partner as well.

- Furthermore, Turkey's relations with the U.S. are currently rocky over U.S. support to the Syrian Kurdish militia, the YPG, that Ankara considers a terrorist organisation because of its close relations with the secessionist PKK.
- The threat of American sanctions on Turkey following the latter's decision to buy S-400 missile defence systems from Russia has also contributed greatly to tensions between the two countries.
- Therefore, it is unlikely that Turkey will bend completely to American will although it may do so partially to placate its NATO ally.

What could have been done?

- Instead of engaging in what appear to have been fruitless negotiations with the U.S. over the past year, India, China, the EU and other affected entities could have spent their time more productively in building a counter with an alternative financial architecture, immune to the U.S.'s arbitrary moves.

6. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

Context

- US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced in Washington DC that the Trump administration's "intent to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including its Qods Force, as a foreign terrorist organisation in accordance with Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act".

Details

- The IRGC was set up in 1979 after Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution as an ideologically-driven branch of the armed forces of Iran, to protect the newly established Islamic system from hostile foreign powers and internal dissensions.

- The IRGC is today a 125,000-strong force with ground, naval, and air wings, tasked with internal and border security, law enforcement, and protection of Iran's missiles.
- It controls the Basij militia, a semi-government paramilitary force estimated to have up to a million active members. The elite Quds Force or Qods Corps is an elite wing of the IRGC, reporting directly to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.
- Pompeo announced that "this is the first time that the United States has designated a part of another government as an FTO". It had taken this "historic step" because, he said, "the Iranian regime's use of terrorism as a tool of statecraft makes it fundamentally different from any other government".

Why is this organisation under the radar of USA now?

- It has 10,000-20,000 members, and carries out unconventional warfare beyond Iran's borders, often working with non-state actors such as the Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shia militias in Iraq and Syria.
- The State Department said that "the (designation of) IRGC (as an) FTO... highlights that Iran is an outlaw regime that uses terrorism as a key tool of statecraft and that the IRGC, part of Iran's official military, has engaged in terrorist activity or terrorism since its inception 40 years ago.
- "The IRGC has been directly involved in terrorist plotting; its support for terrorism is foundational and institutional, and it has killed US citizens. It is also responsible for taking hostages and wrongfully detaining numerous US persons, several of whom remain in captivity in Iran today."

Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO)

Section 219 of the United States Immigration and Nationality Act: It authorises the Secretary of State to "designate an organization as a foreign terrorist organization... if the Secretary finds that

- the organization is a foreign organization;
- the organization engages in terrorist activity or terrorism... or
- ...threatens the security of United States nationals or the national security of the United States".

Other FTO's

- Sixty-seven terrorist organisations currently figure on the State Department's list of FTOs, including Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Qaida and its regional branches, the Islamic State and its regional operations, Jundallah, Boko Haram, and the Colombian FARC.
- Also on the list are several organisations based in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which directly threaten India, such as the Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Hizb ul-Mujahideen, Haqqani Network, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

- The Indian Mujahideen, LTTE, and Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami-Bangladesh are also on the list of 67 FTOs.

Impact

- The designation as FTO will impose sweeping economic and travel sanctions on the IRGC and on organisations, companies, and individuals that have links to it.

Iran's reaction

- Tehran named the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) as a terrorist organisation and the US government as a sponsor of terror

Conclusion

- The US action is bound to raise tensions in the Middle East.

7. Matara-Beliatta Railway Extension

Context

- The Sri Lankan government inaugurated its fastest railway line, which has been built with the assistance of the Chinese government.
- Sri Lanka finished the construction of first 26.75-km Matara-Beliatta railway extension first time after the island nation got independent in 1948.

Details

- The project was financed by the Export-Import Bank of China (China Exim Bank) and the contract was awarded to the China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation.
- Connecting its coastal city of Matara and Beliatta in Hambantota, it will boost passenger traffic into the island's Deep South.

8. Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) doctrine

- The doctrine emerged during the Cold War in the mid-20th century when the U.S. and the erstwhile U.S.S.R. had stockpiled so many nuclear weapons that if launched, the weapons could destroy both nations many times over.
- A military doctrine, also known as the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, which states that when two adversaries possess nuclear weapons, neither of them is likely to use them. This is because both sides are likely to suffer severe losses from a nuclear attack, irrespective of who attacks first.
- The MAD doctrine is considered an application of the Nash equilibrium, wherein the threat of a strong retaliatory attack prevents both sides from initiating a conflict. The result is lasting prevention of a nuclear attack.
- The doctrine has been criticised for assuming that the victim of the first attack will possess sufficient capabilities after the attack to retaliate strongly.

9. Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First

Context

- President Vladimir Putin will confer its highest civilian award, the "Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First," on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his work on bilateral ties.

Details

- The Order of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First is awarded to prominent government and public figures, prominent representatives of science, culture, art and various sectors of the economy for "exceptional services that contribute to the prosperity, greatness and glory of Russia,"
- It was first awarded by former Russian Tsar 'Peter the Great' in 1698 and subsequently discontinued.
- In 1998, former President Boris Yeltsin reinstated the honour by a presidential decree.
- Previous recipients include Chinese President Xi Jinping, and presidents of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

10. Order of Zayed

- UAE President Khalifa bin Zayed has awarded Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Details

- It is UAE's highest civilian award, 'the Order of Zayed'
- The honor was conferred on Modi for his efforts to boost bilateral ties with the UAE

11. Sri Lanka bomb blasts

Context:

- More than 200 people were killed and nearly 500 injured in a series of blasts that shook Sri Lanka on Easter
- Churches and luxury hotels were targeted in the deadliest incidents since the civil war ended a decade ago.

Details:

- The apparently coordinated attacks were the deadliest to hit the country in the decade since the end of a bloody civil war that killed up to 100,000 people and evoked painful memories for many Sri Lankans.
- They also marked a devastating escalation of violence against the country's Christian minority that has been targeted in the past, but never to such brutal effect.

Concerns

- This exposes the political dysfunction within the government because of the animosity between President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe

- * Wickremesinghe has even said neither he nor his ministers were kept informed about the advance information on attacks, and there are reports that the prime minister hasn't been allowed to attend meetings of the Security Council

- Sri Lankan ministers have now acknowledged that foreign intelligence agencies alerted Colombo about possible attacks but nothing seems to have been done to thwart them



- The unconcern with which this is being discussed by government Ministers and officials shows an unbelievable lack of awareness, that far from making any party look good, this revelation reflects the sheer incompetence, inadequacy and arrogance of the government.

Resemblance with earlier attacks

- The Easter weekend attacks are similar to the al-Qaeda attacks of the 2000s than to recent attacks of IS.
- Like the 2000 attack on the USS Cole in Yemen, the 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, the 2002 bombings in Bali, the 2003 truck bombs in Istanbul, the 2004 train bombings in Madrid, the 2005 tube and bus bombings in London, the Sri Lanka bombings involved multiple attackers acting in concert. With the exception of September 11, all of these also involved Improvised Explosive Devices (IED).

Who are the National Thowheeth Jama'ath, the group suspected to have carried out the coordinated terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter?

- Thowheeth groups are ideologically similar to the ISIS which has its origins in the Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, a group that later became part of al-Qaeda.
- The NTJ, believed to be an extremely radical group, is said to be a breakaway faction of the Sri Lanka Thowheeth Jama'ath.
- Not much is known about the NTJ, but it has been on the radar of Sri Lanka's police since about 2017, when the Sinhalese Buddhist fundamentalist group Bodu Bala Sena — which was formed in 2012

So, does Sri Lanka have an Islamist jihadist problem that has not been widely recognised so far? Is there a broader Muslim-Buddhist conflict in the country?

- Sri Lanka's Muslims make up less than 10% of the country's 21 million people. An overwhelming 70% of the population is Sinhala-Buddhist. Christians are under 7%, and they are both Tamil and Sinhalese. Hindus are 12.6%, and are almost entirely Tamil.
- While there were no instances of Sri Lankan jihadist groups, or individual Sri Lankan jihadists going to join the war in Bosnia or Afghanistan, there were concerns from time to time in the 1990s that Wahhabism was gaining ground in the country, especially in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts of eastern Sri Lanka, which have a significant Muslim population.
- In the entire Eastern district, which includes Trincomalee, Muslims are one-third of the population — Tamils and Sinhalese too, are a third each in the Eastern province

Why Sri Lanka?

- Sri Lanka has a 7.4 per cent Muslim minority; an undetermined number are from the Wahabi sect and others are Sufis. However, in that country's majority and hard-boiled nationalism, everyone other than Sinhala Buddhists are suspected of being anti-national.

- A severe trust deficit exists based upon years of internal civil war and internecine violence between various faiths and groups. The IS worked on this and recruited their fighters on the basis of propaganda brainwashing the local recruits.
- It is just the kind of situation tailor made for two things;
 - * first, a demonstration of international radical extremist capability;
 - * second to send home a message that these terror networks exist across the world and mother organisations still control them
- Sri Lanka was a soft target. Having successfully defeated the Tamil Tigers rebel group a decade ago through military might, Sri Lanka has become complacent. It has not seen a pressing need to develop police and non-military intelligence capacity to counter terrorism.
- At the same time, it has struggled with good governance and political stability.
- It has faced a major constitutional crisis
- Therefore in the competitive world of international terror, the IS perceives a need to continue retaining its current primacy; any leeway given to other major groups such as al Qaeda will see many years of effort in the Middle East wasted.

If there is a Muslim-Buddhist problem in the country, why was the Christian minority targeted? What signals were being sent, and to whom?

- Targeting churches on Easter seemed designed to attract maximum international attention, as was the targeting of five-star hotels, frequented by high-end international tourists, diplomats, professionals and wealthy Sri Lankans.
- All the hotels were hosting a customary and popular Easter brunch at the time of the attacks.
- Targeting the Sinhala majority would be counterproductive as the retaliation from radical Sinhala groups such as Bodu Bala Sena would be intense.
- Targeting the Tamil community would similarly be counterproductive since the LTTE's networks may eventually be needed.
- The Christian community is 9.7 per cent of the population and historically no Christian-Muslim feud exists in the island. That is all the more reason that the chances of retaliation against Muslims would be low.
- The IS, with its caliphate-like aspirations, would have viewed the killings at Christchurch, New Zealand as just the event to avenge with an act against Christians anywhere on the globe. Easter was the most appropriate time as was the selection of churches and five-star hotels where western tourists (again largely Christian) would be present in large numbers.

- * The type of suicide bombings witnessed in Sri Lanka would have called for resource collection, planning, motivation of seven suicide bombers and very careful coordination without even an iota of a leak. Five weeks to plan is far too little time. Christchurch probably only became a justification.

How does Islamist extremism in Sri Lanka sit with similar impulses in the wider Indian Ocean region, specifically the Maldives?

- The Maldives has been a country of greater concern than Sri Lanka where Islamist radicalism is concerned. More than 200 Maldivian youth were believed to have joined the ISIS by the end of December 2015.
 - * Present estimates are not available, but the numbers have gone up. Considering that Maldives has a population of only 4,50,000, this is a huge number.
- The atolls have long been a playground for preachers of radical Islam, encouraged under the Gayoom dictatorship.

What are the takeaways for India from this situation with regard to jihadist extremism in the Indian Ocean region?

- First, it shows once again the vulnerability of states and the ever-present nature of terrorism as an asymmetrical threat. Whatever be the intelligence lapses, none of us are safe from suicide bombers, not America, not India.
- Second, though Sri Lanka may be the victim this time, the need for intelligence-sharing and connecting the dots internationally is clear. This has to include operational matters as well as tracking financial flows. All this is happening already, but professionals may learn new lessons as the investigations proceed and the plot unravels.
- Third, the use of social media is a critical factor. We have come to learn about the dangers of radicalisation through social media. Experts have to devise strategies to counter it. It will be safe to assume that consultations and cooperation between Sri Lanka and India will intensify though this will necessarily stay under the radar.
- Strategically, the destabilisation, for whatever reason, of Sri Lanka, a country that India counts as a close friend and ally despite the problems arising from competing Chinese interests, undermines India's interests in the Indian Ocean region.
- The Sri Lanka attacks hold major implications for Indian security, in part because the main group behind the bombings, the National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ), is an ideological offspring of the rapidly growing, Saudi-funded Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jamath (TNTJ). The TNTJ, wedded to fanatical Wahhabism, rails against idolaters. It helped establish the Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamath, from which the bomber outfit NTJ emerged as a splinter.

- Like the 2016 brutal Dhaka café attack, the Sri Lanka slaughter was carried out by educated Islamists from well-off families. And just as Bangladesh blamed Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) for the attack, the NTJ has ties with ISI's front organisation, Lashkar-e-Taiba, which, through its Sri Lanka operations, has sought links with the TNTJ in India.
- NTJ leader Zaharan Hashim was inspired by fugitive Indian preacher Zakir Naik's sermons and received funds from Indian jihadists.

Conclusion

- Clearly, the Sri Lankan government will have to get its act together, both to apprehend those responsible for Sunday's bombings and to prevent further attacks

Emergency

Who can initiate it?

- Under the Public Security Ordinance (PSO) of 1947, the President can proclaim an emergency for all or parts of Sri Lanka, if "he is of the opinion that it is expedient to do so in the interests of public security and the preservation of public order or for the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community".
- Article 155(2) under Chapter XVIII (Public Security) of Sri Lanka's 1978 Constitution says that "the power to make Emergency Regulations under the Public Security Ordinance... shall include the power to make regulations having the legal effect of over-riding, amending or suspending the operation of the provisions of any law, except the provisions of the Constitution".
- Only the President can declare an emergency, and his decision is not subject to judicial review. However, he must summon Parliament immediately to inform it of his decision.
- Parliament must approve of the proclamation within 14 days, failing which the proclamation expires at the end of one month.

Provisions under it

- Under the PSO, Emergency Regulations allow for detentions of individuals; entering, searching, and takeovers of private property; and for "amending any law, for suspending the operation of any law and for applying any law with or without modification".
- The Ordinance also grants "Special Powers" to the President to "call out all or any of the members of all or any of the armed forces for the maintenance of public order", and to put restrictions on people's movement.
- The Sri Lankan Constitution also permits restrictions on fundamental rights through the Emergency Regulations.

Don't give in to polarization

Introduction

- The full picture of the formation of this extremist force and the objectives behind their heinous crimes may take time. However, they have succeeded in creating a spectacle of death, mayhem and fear.
- In the months ahead, the climate of fear is going to drastically shape the workings of the state, the political character of future regimes and relations between communities.
- The progressive forces committed to a plural and democratic society have a historical challenge before them, as Sri Lanka is on the verge of falling into the abyss of polarization.

Cultural rights withdrawn

- Authorities in Sri Lanka have now banned women from wearing face veils under an emergency law
- 'Drawing on Islamophobic discourse, Muslims characterised as the "other" are called to explain and take responsibility for the Easter attacks.
- There are escalating demands to ban madrasas and Muslim women's attire without extensively consulting the Muslim community.
- Furthermore, as with the previous riots that targeted Muslim businesses, scapegoating Muslims for future economic problems is a real fear.

Economy will get weak

- Sri Lanka is known for low cost tourism. It is a small budget international beach destination. With this attack the fragile national economy is bound to decline with a major hit on the significant tourist industry.
- The July 1983 ethnic cleansing and the armed conflict brought tremendous disorder.
 - * It isolated Sri Lanka at a time when its peers such as Malaysia and Thailand gained economically from major foreign investments.
- In these times of protectionism, an economic shock affecting international investment, capital flows and trade with Sri Lanka can lead to a national economic crisis.

Establishment of Authoritarian Regime?

- Even more dangerously, an authoritarian anti-terrorist leadership is now the kneejerk call for the upcoming presidential elections.
- Political Parties now claim only a strongman leader can redeem the country. This may lead to concentration of powers in few hands leading to violation of freedom of expression, dictatorship and suppression of voices.

Conclusion

- The liberal and left forces in the country, and the Sinhala intelligentsia in particular, have to find the courage and discourse to take on the chauvinist anti-Muslim rhetorical barrage.

- A likely casualty of the Easter attacks is going to be the rights of Muslim youth and the broader freedoms of the citizenry.
- The challenge before the country is to turn national mourning and grief into a call for coexistence and democracy.

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Breaking new ground

What's in the news?

- A recent judgment of the Madras High Court, Madurai Bench, has extended enjoyment of civil rights, especially those pertaining to marriage, to transpersons.
- While this development is path-breaking for much of the country, the judgment also opens doors to the larger LGBTQ community for availing civil rights including marriage, succession and inheritance.

A Look at some legal precedents:

- In the judgment delivered in Arunkumar and Sreeja v. Inspector General of Registration and Others (2019), the Madras High Court has held that a properly solemnised marriage between a male and transwoman is valid under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, and the Registrar of Marriages is bound to register the same.
- The judgment quotes NALSA v. Union of India (2014), which held that transgender persons have the right to decide their "self-identified gender".

Significance of the judgement issued by the Madurai Bench:

- The Madurai Bench judgment, however, breaks new ground when it comes to the interpretation of the statutory terms found in the Hindu Marriage Act, especially that of bride.
- It states that the expression "bride" occurring in Section 5 of the Hindu Marriage Act cannot have a static or immutable meaning.
- As noted in Justice G.P. Singh's Principles of Statutory Interpretation, the court is free to apply the current meaning of a statute to present-day conditions.
- It is important to note that the nine-judge Bench in Justice (Retd.) K.S. Puttaswamy made a telling reference to the landmark judgment, Obergefell v. Hodges (2015), wherein the U.S. Supreme Court held that the "fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples by both Due Process Clause and Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment."
- The Madurai Bench judgment has revised the legal construction of gender and the conventional interpretation of terms such as "bride" and "bridegroom".

- Now, when this is read along with the Supreme Court's explicit reference to the American court's guarantee of right to marry to homosexual couples shows that there cannot be a legal bar any more to extending civil rights such as marriage, succession or inheritance to LGBTQ couples who have decided to get married consensually, have married in accordance with the existing laws and are not in violation of any other laws.

Concluding Remarks:

- At the preliminary hearings before the Supreme Court in Navtej Singh Johar, the Solicitor General, representing the Government of India, sought the curtailing of the scope of the case to that of the decriminalisation aspect or the constitutional validity of Section 377 of Indian Penal Code, 1860 alone.
- The Supreme Court, consequently, did not have an opportunity to examine the bundle of rights that were to naturally arise from the striking down of Section 377.
- Therefore, in this context, the present judgment is truly path-breaking for the LGBTQ community, which is denied equal protection of laws with regard to civil rights.

2. Deori Tribe

- The 'Deori tribe' is one of the major indigenous communities of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh
- In ancient times of the Chutiya kingdom, the Deoris were priests of the Chutiya community
- The Deori community belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of Mongoloid stock.

3. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)

- ICDS Scheme providing for supplementary nutrition, immunization and pre-school education to the children is a popular flagship programme of the government.
- It is one of the world's largest programs providing for an integrated package of services for the holistic development of the child. ICDS is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme implemented by state governments and union territories.
 - * All components of ICDS except Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) are financed through a 60:40 ratio (central: state).
 - * The Supplementary Nutrition Programme (SNP) component was funded through a 50:50 ratio. The North East states have a 90:10 ratio.

- These services are provided from Anganwadi centers established mainly in rural areas and staffed with frontline workers.
- In addition to fighting malnutrition and ill health, the programme is also intended to combat gender inequality by providing girls the same resources as boys.
- Implemented by the Women and Child Development Ministry

Beneficiaries

- Children in the age group of 0-6 years
- Pregnant women and
- Lactating mothers

Objectives of the Scheme are:

- to improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age-group 0-6 years;
- to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical and social development of the child;
- to reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition and school dropout;
- to achieve effective co-ordination of policy and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development; and
- to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.

The following services are sponsored under ICDS to help achieve its objectives:

- Supplementary nutrition
- Pre-school non formal education
- Nutrition and Health information
- Health checkup
- Immunization
- Referral services

The last three services are related to health and are provided by Ministry/Department of Health and Family Welfare through NRHM & Health system.

Context

- As per a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition shows that a diet with relatively more protein is needed during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy for the growth and development of the baby.
- Accordingly the Centre's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme provides supplementary nutrition services for children

4. Sex on false promise of marriage is rape: Supreme Court

Context

- Supreme Court has reiterated its legal position and has held that a man having sex with a woman promising to marry her will amount to rape if he breaks the promise.

Background

- The case concerns the rape of a woman by a government doctor in Chhattisgarh in 2013.
- The man had engaged in a physical relationship with her at his home on the promise of marrying her.
- At the time of the crime, he was already engaged to marry another woman. He later broke his promise to the victim.
- On the basis of an FIR filed, the man was convicted of rape. The conviction was confirmed by the High Court. He was sentenced to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment. The apex court was appealed to.

What did SC say?

- "If it is established and proved that from the very beginning the accused who gave the promise to the victim to marry, did not have any intention to marry and the victim gave the consent for sexual intercourse on such an assurance by the accused that he would marry her, such a consent can be said to be a consent obtained on a misconception of fact as per Section 90 of the IPC (Consent known to be given under fear or misconception) and, in such a case, such a consent would not excuse the offender and such an offender can be said to have committed the rape as defined under Section 375 of the IPC and can be convicted for the offence under Section 376 of the IPC."
 - * The woman's consent having been obtained by fraud. The women would not have consented to the sexual act had he not promised her marriage.
 - * So it will be of no consequence whatsoever and person will be charged with rape.
- "Rape is the most morally and physically reprehensible crime in a society, an assault on the body, mind and privacy of the victim. While a murderer destroys the physical frame of the victim, a rapist degrades and defiles the soul of a helpless female. Rape reduces a woman to an animal, as it shakes the very core of her life," Justice Shah wrote
- The court said rape is the "most hated crime". "It tantamounts to a serious blow to the supreme honour of a woman, and offends both her esteem and dignity,"
- The mere fact that both the victim and her attacker have married separately moved on does not erase the horror of what was committed on her. The rapist must face the consequences of the crime.

- The court however reduced his sentence to seven years' imprisonment.

Concerns

- By equating cheating with rape, we trivialise rape, which remains a horrific crime reported with depressing regularity from Kathua to Unnao.
- The judgment also makes an unstated assumption that premarital sex is not ok — unless accompanied by intent to marry. But sex is not a reward for marriage and every instance of premarital sex need not end in marriage.
- Above all we have to ask: What do women hope to achieve when they file rape complaints against such men? Revenge? Marriage? These cases end in a settlement — either money or marriage. But what is the value of a marriage conducted under the threat of jail?

Conclusion

- As many as 70-80% of the rape complaints received by Delhi's Rape Crisis Centre fall in this grey category about consent obtained on false information.
- Therefore some kind of separate provision for these types of cases where adult women agree to sex only because men have promised to marry them

5. The long wait for safety

- A year after the launch of the Safe Cities programme, not much headway has been made in making cities safer for women.

A watershed moment:

- It is important to note that following the horrific gang rape of a young woman in a moving bus in New Delhi in December 2012 and the public outcry that followed it, the United Progressive Alliance-2 government set up the Nirbhaya Fund, named after the victim as she was referred to by the media, to ensure the safety of women across the country, with an initial corpus of ₹1,000 crore.
- The fund was announced at the fag end of that government's term, and so little was spent from it.
- Over six years, the amount increased to ₹3,600 crore, but reports emerged that the money was not being used. Faced with severe criticism for this, the National Democratic Alliance government approved in March 2018 ₹2,919 crore from this corpus for the Safe Cities programme for eight major cities — Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Lucknow — for three years.
- The Centre and the States share the expenses for the scheme (60:40). The amount given by the Central government is ₹2,016.50 crore.
- The Centre invited proposals from the Director Generals of Police (DGP) of these eight cities as well as from Municipal Commissioners.

- The Hindu newspaper had tracked the status of implementation of the Safe Cities programme in six of the eight cities and found that not a single penny had been spent by the local administrations despite funds being released by the Centre.
- The police in many cities said that tendering for works proposed by them under the programme (such as installation of CCTV cameras, PCR vans, e-toilets and pink patrol bikes and cars) will begin only after the Lok Sabha election is over.
- In Delhi, senior officials drew a blank when asked about the execution of the scheme.

Public Pressure on Political Parties:

- Public pressure forced both the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress to give more primacy to women's safety in their 2014 manifestos, however, critics allege that the same is not the case this time.
- Critics allege that despite the BJP's 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' scheme, which aims to "prevent gender-biased sex selective elimination, ensure survival and protection of the girl child, and ensure education of girls", and the Congress's plan to develop a Citizens' Charter for Women's Safety and Security, the promise to fight against gender violence is drowned in the din of claims and counter-claims by political parties this election season.
- Critics further point out that both the BJP and the Congress look at women's safety only through the prism of criminal investigation — the BJP talks about 'forensic facilities' and 'fast-track courts', and the Congress proposes a 'separate investigative agency' for heinous crimes against women.
- The focus on making public spaces safe and accessible for women through sustained campaigns is entirely absent.

Case in Point: Lucknow

- As man In Lucknow, women police constables wearing headphones lend a patient ear to complaints from women on the other end of the line, type out complaints, and submit them online for further action.
- The call centre is not far from the U.P. Police Headquarters. The 'Women Power Helpline 1090' was launched to ensure that police help is only a phone call away.
- Victims don't need to go to the police station to file a complaint. The requirement to file an FIR, too, has been dispensed with in order to encourage women to break their silence without fear of reprisal, often from their own families.

- As many as 45 women constables have been tasked with answering complaints about lewd phone calls, online abuse, stalking and sexual harassment. The helpline, which was launched in 2012, registers about 730 complaints a day. Once a complaint is filed, a male constable calls the offender and rebukes him for his misdemeanour, warns him of police action and, in rare cases when this is insufficient, books him for a crime. The grievance is considered resolved only after following up with the victim over 45 days.
- The data collected from calls made to the helpline offer an insight into the State. The most number of complaints come from Lucknow, Kanpur, Prayagraj, Varanasi and Gorakhpur. Data from 2018 show that 53% of women who called the helpline were non-working women. Thirty-four per cent of the calls came from college students. More than 70% of the complaints were about lewd phone calls. Incidents of cyber-harassment increased by four times in 2018 from the previous year (2017).
- The U.P. police plans to double the capability of this unique initiative under the Safe Cities programme and add 40 more computer terminals
- The Central government has approved ₹194 crore for Lucknow from the Nirbhaya Fund. Proposals also include integrating 1090 with another helpline, UP 100 (the Uttar Pradesh Police Emergency Management System); setting up an integrated control room linked to 1,500 CCTVs; pink outposts for facilitating easy filing of complaints by women; 100 pink patrol scooters, 100 pink SUVs, 74 pink toilets, and public transport buses that are GPS-enabled and equipped with panic buttons and CCTV cameras.
- A Data Analytics centre at the 1090 call centre has also been proposed

Case in Point: Delhi

- The city police say its women officers patrol outside schools and colleges to ensure that women students are safe.
- All the Station House Officers are directed to increase patrolling in winter as the streets are more lonely then and visibility is low. Police booths and facilitation desks are also provided at identifiable places in crowded areas
- The Delhi police was sanctioned ₹663.67 crore under the scheme. It was also the only city to receive 100% funding from the Centre. The Delhi police plans to procure hi-tech 'field devices' for enhanced real-time responses to crimes in the city; have dedicated women safety patrol vans equipped with dashboards for viewing live feeds from CCTV cameras across the city; and GPS tracking facilities. However, despite the scheme being approved more than a year ago, a senior official seems to know little about it.

Case in Point: Chennai:

- In 2016, Chennai was gripped by horror when a 24-year-old Infosys employee was hacked to death at a busy railway station in broad daylight.
- In January 2019, a woman was molested at the Taramani MRTS station by railway staff.
- The Chennai Corporation and police have an elaborate plan to augment the infrastructure in the city to ensure safety of women.
- The local body plans to have 617 'safe zone clusters' in places considered crime hotspots and where surveillance cameras and street lights are to be installed.
- These safe clusters will cover 19 bus stands, 10 colleges, 70 schools, seven shopping malls, seven IT parks and 56 railway stations as well as markets and places of worship.
- As many as 500 e-toilets for women are to be set up in public places and 30 mobile toilets for women police staff on bandobust duty at the cost of ₹27.77 crore.
- The city police also plan to conduct a GIS-based heat map of areas of crime against women that is to be integrated with notification services on mobile applications.
- A 24x7 emergency app to track women in distress and a helpline service for women are on the cards, officials claim. The total amount sanctioned to the city under the Safe Cities project is ₹426 crore.
- However, critics allege that all these plans remain only on paper

Case in Point: Hyderabad

- Among the initiatives Hyderabad has already undertaken to ensure that women are safe, the police count its SHE teams as a success.
- The aim of the SHE teams is to curb 'eve-teasing' in all aspects and in all places.
- In the last four and a half years, the SHE teams in Hyderabad have received 12,000 petitions. But these teams mostly have male officers.

Case in Point: Bangalore

- The Bengaluru police launched pink Hoysalas, or patrolling vehicles, to exclusively address women and child safety issues.
- However, these pink Hoysalas are often used for other policing jobs. Although this was started as a service that would have exclusive women patrolling staff, many of the Hoysalas are run by male police personnel.

Concluding Remarks:

- An overemphasis on technology and policing will enhance security, but not necessarily make cities safer for women or enhance their access to public spaces.

- Besides policing, we need to look at urban planning and designing gender-friendly spaces. We need to effect a change in cultural and social norms through campaigns.
- Globally, wherever cities have made significant changes, it has been because of the municipal authorities. Whether it is New York, London, Bogota, or Seoul, it is because the mayoral system has been strengthened. For cities we must ask for stronger local bodies.
- Conversations with police officials across cities show that it is not only the State authorities, but also the civic authorities who have a role to play in securing the safety of women in public places.

6. TikTok ban in India

Context

- In 2018, the Indian government issued a ban on all pornographic websites and platforms in the country for hosting content related to child pornography.
- In a follow up to that, the government issued a ban on the popular short video platform TikTok after it was found to host content related to child pornography.
- Obliging to the government order, Apple and Google pulled off the TikTok app from their respective app stores.

Why is TikTok banned?

- TikTok has been banned after the platform was found to host content related to child pornography.
- The government issued a formal ban on all pornographic websites last year that hosted child pornography. The ban has been imposed to prevent the promotion of child-related crimes.

Regulation and not ban need of the hour

- TikTok isn't the only one battling a rising tide of porn, violence, and fake news. Incumbents such as Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook have been fighting the same problems as TikTok has, but they haven't yet faced such extreme measures.
- Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) an industry body of Internet and mobile device has said Any "arbitrary" ban on social media platforms and intermediaries could impede foreign direct investment and affect expansion of the digital India initiative

Singled out

- Unlike TikTok, most other social media and video/photo sharing apps are largely private and controlled in nature, which means a post can only be seen by a limited network of a user.
- The issue with TikTok is it encourages interactivity over videos

- Facebook and Instagram start out with smaller circles or friends groups, while TikTok can get to a larger audience quickly – including allowing video interaction with strangers.
- Given that TikTok is much younger to most others in the segment, the app lacks certain safeguards to ensure users' safety. For instance, there are no checks and balances on the app to moderate user-generated content.
- Facebook and Instagram are also using sophisticated artificial intelligence tools to detect revenge porn. Vernacular-language social network Sharechat also has algorithms that flag illicit content.
- YouTube gives you policies and they remove your video or puts a strike against your account, but there's no such rule or guideline on TikTok

Will this ban help?

- Taking the app down can slam the brakes on its meteoric rise, but won't kill it. Banning one app won't change user behaviour, experts said.
- For starters, users who have it installed can continue using it. And though it's not directly available for download from the app store, there are ways to get it.
- In fact, getting on the app is easy: Any existing user can share the app with others through platforms like ShareIt.
- There are also several third-party app stores, other than those of Google and Apple – apkpure, androidapkbbox, and uptodown, among others – where TikTok is still available.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. 5G services

Context:

- South Korea will become the first country to commercially launch fifth-generation (5G) services as it rolls out the latest wireless technology with Samsung Electronics

Details

- 5G will use millimeter wave (mmWave) band transmission
 - * Cellular technology transmits data over radio waves, which depending on the type of electromagnetic signal is measured as a different frequency.
 - * The higher the frequency, the smaller the wavelength, so millimeter wave technology refers to signals with a wavelength that's measured in millimeters, and is generally defined as between 30 GHz and 300 GHz.

- * The advantage to the shorter wavelengths found in millimeter wave technology is that antennas used to transmit and receive the signals can be made comparably smaller.

- The technology can offer 20-times faster data speeds than 4G long-term evolution (LTE) networks and better support for artificial intelligence and virtual reality with low latency.
- It is crucial for the future development of devices ranging from self-driving vehicles that send data traffic to one another in real time, industrial robots, drones and other elements of the Internet of Things.

2. Cell-Based Meat/ Clean Meat /Cultured Meat

Context:

- The country's first project to research on cell-based meat, also called clean meat, would be taken up at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) with the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) deciding to give Rs. 4.5 crore for the two-year work as the initial grant.

Cor

COMPARISON BETWEEN 3G, 4G AND 5G		
3G	4G	5G
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is also called as tri band 3G 2. It is based on high capacity broad band data 3. The maximum data transfer speed is up to 3.1 mbps 4. It provides digital navigation 5. It provides video access 6. 3G is successor to 2G 7. Seamless roaming 8. High data rates 9. Band width per frequency channel is up to 20Mhz 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 4G is present since 2000 2. 4G is the fourth generation of mobile communication technology 3. 4G provides dynamic information access, wearable devices 4. It supports data band width in Mbps 5. Speeds for 4G are further increased to keep up with data access demand used by various services 6. 4G provide high definition streaming and some additional features such as multimedia Newspaper and ultra-broadband Internet access which were not present in 3G 7. Band width per frequency channel is up to 100Mhz 8. In 4G concatenated codes are used for error detection 9. CDMA multiple access 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 5G will come completely in 2020 2. 5G is the revolution in 4G mobile communication technology. It is based in internet protocol 6 3. 5G provides dynamic Information access, wearable devices with AI capabilities 4. The data transfer speed is up to 1 gbps 5. 5G will provide very high speed as well as efficient use of available band width to the consumers 6. 5G includes large phone memory, dialing speed, and much more and also we can hook our 5G cell phones with laptop to get broadband Internet access 7. Band width per frequency channel is up to 28Ghz 8. The high quality of service of 5G technology based on policy to avoid error 9. CDMA & BDMA multiple access

Details

- The National Research Centre on Meat, which has a unit at Chengicherla abattoir, would partner with the CCMB in the pioneering work to develop cultured meat,
- Cell-based meat is nutritionally equivalent to conventional animal meat, and tastes, smells, looks and feels exactly the same. Its only difference lies in the method of production
- Clean meat would be produced through cellular agriculture with cells sourced from animals and cultivated into meat.

Structure

- The Atal Incubation Centre (AIC) of the CCMB has been partnering with the Humane Society International (HSI) to develop and promote the clean meat sector.
- The AIC and HSI have also announced the launch of 'Centre for Predictive Human Model System' (CPHMS), which would be dedicated for promoting the new approach of scientific research using non-animal models. The facility would propagate non-animal methodologies in life sciences research in India as it has been happening in the West.
- The fledgling centre would facilitate training courses in research, conduct workshops, offer fellowship programmes, develop a network of scientists to promote the paradigm shift in research and funding, and support Ph.D students in their research.

Significance

- It promises to revolutionize the food system by providing protein without harming the environment
- This new method of producing meat shows strong promise of revolutionising the food system in terms of tackling pressing global issues such as food security, environmental sustainability and animal welfare.

3. Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (CCMB)

- It is a premier research organization in frontier areas of modern biology.
- The objectives of the Centre are to conduct high quality basic research and training in frontier areas of modern biology, and promote centralized national facilities for new and modern techniques in the inter-disciplinary areas of biology.
- CCMB is a Biotechnology research establishment of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research located in Hyderabad.
- In recognition for its contribution to modern biology, CCMB has been chosen as a Centre of Excellence by UNESCO Global Network for Molecular and Cell Biology MCBN and has been designated as a South Centre for Excellence for Research and Training by the Third World Academy of Sciences TWAS, Italy

Context

- Scientists at the Centre for Cellular & Molecular Biology (CCMB) have discovered a new enzyme in bacteria
- This discovery by the CCMB helps in breaking cell walls of bacteria and hence, offers a potential for a new drug delivery to arrest the anti-bacterial resistance through existing antibiotic drugs.

Background

- Bacteria have been on Earth for the last 3.8 to 4 billion years. And they have depended on whatever the environment has provided them for carrying on with their lives and reproduction.
- And many of these bacteria feed on us. While some of them are "safe" and even useful for us (the human gut hosts about 100 trillion bacteria, helping us in our growth and development), many others make us ill and even kill us. And we humans have tried various ways to fight these infections using herbs and drugs since ancient times.
- Even as we discover more and more drugs and molecules to fight them, bacteria quickly change their genetic composition by mutation and resist the action of the drug. It has thus been a tug of war between scientists and bacteria.

Details

- There are many diseases spread by the bacteria. In order to understand the root cause of its spread and how they develop resistance it is crucial to know how cells grow in bacteria to understand the anti-bacterial resistance to currently available antibiotics.
- So knowing how its cell function, its division and growth, helps one to understand diseases like cholera, leprosy, tuberculosis and so on

Functioning

- Bacterial cells are surrounded by a protective cell wall made up of a large sac-like structure called peptidoglycan or PG. The PG that bacteria use to build their cell walls is specific to them alone, and not found anywhere else on earth.
- Researchers have found out in e.coli bacteria how the cell wall is constructed in the first place, they have identified the crucial mechanism behind the process and discovered the new mechanism or enzyme through which the cell regulates growth of its wall.
- Other bacteria, too, have the same enzyme working on cell division as the cell wall is fundamental for bacterial growth and division.
- Therefore, by blocking this 'scissors enzyme' from functioning, new ways to target microbes could be found, leading to a new wave of antibiotic drugs.

4. Chain Melted State

Context

- The University of Edinburgh scientists have discovered a new state of physical matter which allows atoms to exist as both solid and liquid at the same time.

Details

- Until now, atoms in physical matter were understood to exist typically in one of three states — solid, liquid or gas
- However, some elements can, when subjected to extreme conditions, take on the properties of both solid and liquid states.

Example

- Applying high pressures and temperatures to potassium creates a state in which most of the element's atoms form a solid lattice structure.
- However, the structure also contains a second set of potassium atoms that are in a fluid arrangement.

5. Seeing darkness

What's in the news?

- On April 10, 2019, the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) collaboration showed the world the 'unseeable': the very first image of a black hole.

What are Black Holes?

- Black holes are some of the strangest and most fascinating objects found in outer space.
- They are objects of extreme density, with such strong gravitational attraction that even light cannot escape from their grasp if it comes near enough.
- Albert Einstein first predicted black holes in 1916 with his general theory of relativity. The term "black hole" was coined in 1967 by American astronomer John Wheeler, and the first one was discovered in 1971.
- There are three types: stellar black holes, supermassive black holes and intermediate black holes.
- Scientists aren't certain how such large black holes spawn. Once they've formed, they gather mass from the dust and gas around them, material that is plentiful in the center of galaxies, allowing them to grow to enormous sizes.

Editorial Analysis:

- The black hole itself cannot be seen, because light cannot escape its intense gravitational attraction.
- The so-called event horizon that envelops the black hole is the point of no return and any object transgressing this boundary is lost. Just outside is a region where a photon (light quantum) can orbit the black hole without falling in. This is called the 'last photon ring', and this is what the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) imaged, seeing in effect the silhouette of a black hole.

A Brief Look at the Past:

- About a hundred years after the black hole made its way into physics through Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity, soon after the LIGO collaboration first directly observed the gravitational waves made by the merging of two black holes, the 'dark star' had finally been imaged.
- The Higgs boson was detected 50 years after it had been postulated, and gravitational waves were observed a century after Einstein predicted them.

Visual Proof of the Existence of Black Holes:

- Visual proof of the existence of black holes comes a century after they appeared in scientific literature.
- In a collaborative effort, eight telescopes around the world were used for the experiment. The challenges included making each observe the same broad range of wavelengths around 1.3 mm and having precise atomic clocks at each location, so the data could be combined.

Certain Specifics on Black Holes:

- A black hole marks the end of spacetime as commonly understood, and nothing that enters it can escape from the tremendous gravitational attraction.
- However, this is no real danger, as black holes are located at distances that humans do not have the power to scale.
- The Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) set out to image two candidate supermassive black holes — Sagittarius A*, which is 26,000 light years from the earth, at the centre of the Milky Way, and another which is 55 million light years away at the centre of the Messier 87 galaxy in the Virgo galaxy cluster. But the first image was of the more distant one.
- The very long baseline interferometry technique linked radio dishes of telescopes across the world to produce a virtual telescope the size of the earth. This was needed to obtain the high resolution required for this measurement.
- Combining data from telescopes, each with different characteristics, was a separate challenge. Cutting-edge developments from computer science related to image recognition were used.
- As Katie Bouman, Assistant Professor at the California Institute of Technology, who led the efforts to develop an algorithm to put the data together and create the image, said in a TEDx talk, projects such as the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) succeed owing to interdisciplinary expertise that people bring to the table.
- This experiment endorses the diversity of collaboration just as much as it does unrelenting patience and good faith in the power of science and reason.

6. Titan- Saturn

- Titan is the largest moon of Saturn and the second-largest natural satellite in the Solar System
- It is the second-largest moon in the Solar System after Jupiter's moon Ganymede
- It is the only moon in the solar system known to have clouds and a dense atmosphere
- The moon is named for the Titans of Greek mythology
- It is larger than the planet Mercury and more massive than Pluto, and, in significant ways, it resembles a planet more than it does a typical moon. Hence frequently described as a planet-like moon
- Titan is the most Earth-like body in the solar system. It has lakes, canyons, rivers, dune fields of organic sand particles about the same size as silica sand grains on Earth

Context:

- Lakes filled with liquid methane spotted on Saturn's moon Titan by NASA's Cassini

Details

- Earth has a lot of liquid on its surface, but the same can't be said for many other worlds in our solar system, Titan is the exception, with vast lakes visible from space.
 - * The lakes aren't filled with liquid water, however, as Titan is far too cold for that to be possible. Instead, Titan's lakes are filled with methane, chilled to the point where it becomes a liquid rather than a gas as we think of it on Earth.
- Titan boasts lakes, rivers and seas of hydrocarbons: compounds of hydrogen and carbon like those that are the main components of petroleum and natural gas.
- Titan's liquid is methane and ethane instead of water.

Phantom lakes

- The scientists also described "phantom lakes" that during wintertime appeared to be wide but shallow ponds — perhaps only a few inches deep — but evaporated or drained into the surface by springtime, a process taking seven years on Titan.
- The findings represented further evidence about Titan's hydrological cycle, with liquid hydrocarbons raining down from clouds, flowing across its surface and evaporating back into the sky.
- This is comparable to Earth's water cycle.

Ligeia Mare

- It is a lake in the north polar region of Titan
- It is the second largest body of liquid on the surface of Titan, after Kraken Mare

SECURITY AND DEFENSE

1. Cyber Exercise on Scenario Building & Response

Context

- Directorate of Indian Defence University is organising Cyber Exercise on Scenario Building & Response

Significance of the exercise

- The Exercise is represented by Services, NSCS, NTRO, CERT-in, DRDO, NIC, CSRC, Academia and Industry.
- This exercise shall incorporate all best practices which were recommended during the cyber workshop held earlier with a view to exercise options at different levels to seek synergized response based on the assessment of situation and own capability.
- This exercise is planned to be conducted on an annual basis under the aegis of Indian Defence University.

Scope of the exercise

- Encompass the threat landscape and its impact
- Incident reporting & response framework
- Procedures for information exchange, attribution, evidence gathering and malicious service takedown
- Enhancement of capabilities required to protect information, and information systems
- Enhance cyber awareness, readiness and coordination, integrated international responses & inter-governmental / inter-agency partnerships

2. Dantewada Ambush

Context

- Naxals are suspected to be involved in the attack in which a BJP MLA and four security personnel were killed in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district
 - * Dantewada falls in the Bastar Lok Sabha constituency
- The ambush occurred at the Shyamagiri hills when the MLA's convoy was heading to Kuwakonda from the Bachel area, which is about 450 km from the State capital Raipur.
- The Maoists blew up a vehicle in the convoy with an improvised explosive device (IED) and opened fire at its occupants.

Unsettle the masses

The Maoist view against elections is that it was a people's war against an unjust government. Hence, conducting elections was to be opposed by all means available, and which justified the use of extreme violence. Anyone who opposed its call for a boycott was a potential target, and which included political parties and candidates, election staff and ordinary voters.

- The aim was clearly to disrupt the electoral process, and it will be vital for the administration to ensure polling without fear of violence.
- People in the past have faced threats of having their fingers being chopped if they exercise their constitutional right.
- Maoists suffer dissent poorly, and employ justice that includes kangaroo courts. The judgement is often a public execution.
- Much of the infrastructure like the schools and other government buildings to set up poll stations, several roads, bridges and mobile towers have been blown up.
- Gelatin sticks and explosives, often stolen from sites of mining operations, were strategically hidden under bridges and culverts to prevent vehicular movement on arterial roads,
- The security forces remained their special targets. By killing them, they could also loot their weaponry in order to stock their own requirements.
- Early details also show that in terms of intelligence the attackers managed to be one step ahead, despite the heavy security bandobast in the area in light of the Lok Sabha election

Conduct of elections has been a major trouble

- Voter insecurity was major issue, for if they did not feel confident enough to come out to vote, the Maoists would have achieved their aim.
- Equally important, candidates needed to move around for electioneering.
- Most often teachers and revenue officials, walk long distances over dangerous terrain (with electronic voting machines) in order to set up their stations. Walking became necessary because transportation by road was infinitely more dangerous. In all these cases, these brave civilian officials put duty before life

What should be done to prevent such incidents?

- Given that it is difficult to fully secure a State with a history of violent attacks, it is important that adequate measures be put in place to protect the candidates in the fray
- Beyond security for the peaceful conduct of elections, the latest attack highlights the need for the security forces to keep updating their standard operating procedures.
- It is also a call for the civil administration to keep extending its reach in the forests of central India, especially Bastar.

- In most of the violence-hit regions of India, responsibility for security has been passed on to the paramilitary forces in abundant measure. The capacities of the State police need to be addressed.
- Local communities, in turn, have to be reassured that the fight against Maoism is also a political one.

Way forward

- The difficult task of addressing people's aspirations and concerns, especially about exploitation and alienation from their lands in the face of extractive policies in their resource-rich habitat, must be pursued on a war footing.

3. Dhanush Artillery Guns

- It is the indigenously upgraded gun of the Swedish Bofors gun procured in the 1980s.
- Dhanush is a 155x45 Caliber indigenous gun developed by OFB.
 - * DRDO is developing 155 mm / 52 Cal Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) that will upgrade the 155 mm / 45 Cal Dhanush in the future.
- It is also the first long-range artillery gun to be produced in India, having a range of 38 km.
- It is an upgrade of the existing 155mm, 39 calibre Bofors FH 77 gun.
- It is compatible with all North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) 155 mm ammunition system.
- The gun is fitted with inertial navigation system with global positioning system- (GPS) based gun recording and auto-laying, an enhanced tactical computer for onboard ballistic computations, an onboard muzzle velocity recording, an automated gun sighting system equipped with camera, thermal imaging and laser range finder
- Significant contributions have also been made by DRDO, public sector units such as SAIL and BEL and several private sector firms in the development of the gun

Other Artillery Guns

- M777- USA
 - * For procuring M777s, India in 2016 had entered into a contract with US under the Foreign Military Sales programme
 - * BAE Systems manufacturers these guns
- K9- L&T
 - * The 155mm gun, which is a variant of the K9 Thunder being used by the South Korean army, is being made in India in a partnership between Indian engineering conglomerate Larsen & Toubro and Hanwha Techwin of South Korea.

Context

- The Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) handed over the first batch of six Dhanush artillery guns to the Army.

4. Indian Coast Guard Vessel C-441

Context

- The Indian Coast Guard commissioned its latest acquisition, an interceptor vessel named C-441, at a ceremony held at the Vizhinjam harbour

Details

- ICGS C-441 is the seventh interceptor vessel amongst the series designed and built indigenously by L & T Ltd., Surat.
- The 27.8-metre-long vessel displaces 106 tonnes and has a maximum speed of 45 knots (83 km/hr).
- It is equipped with twin diesel engines and water jet propulsion.
- It also has the capability to undertake multifarious tasks such as close coast surveillance, interdiction, search and rescue and rendering assistance to boats and crafts in distress at sea.
- The ship is fitted with state-of-the art communication, navigational equipment and with light, medium and heavy automatic machine gun onboard as main armament.

5. MH-60R helicopters

Context

- The United States Department of State has approved the sale of 24 MH-60R multi-mission helicopters to India under its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program.

Details

- The MH-60R 'Romeo' Seahawk helicopters are advanced naval machines equipped with sophisticated combat systems – sensors, missiles and torpedoes – to track and hunt enemy boats
- They are deployed by the US Navy as its primary anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface weapons system for Open Ocean and littoral zones.
- Naval forces of many countries, including the Royal Australian Navy, also deploy these choppers.
- For the Indian Navy, the choppers are set to employ Hellfire air-to-surface missiles and Mark 54 anti-submarine torpedoes.
- The submarine hunters will have anti-surface warfare capabilities too, which means they will be capable of detecting surface threats and taking action against enemy ships.
- The choppers are also capable of performing other non-combat maritime roles such as search and rescue, logistics support, personnel transport, medical evacuation and surveillance. They will be able to operate from frigates, destroyers, cruisers and aircraft carriers.

Significance

- India will use the enhanced capability as a deterrent to regional threats and to strengthen its homeland defense
- This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to strengthen the U.S.-Indian strategic relationship and to improve the security of a major defensive partner, which continues to be an important force for political stability, peace, and economic progress in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region
- The helicopters are expected to provide a big boost to the navy, which is grappling with a dwindling and ageing British-built Sea King fleet.
- The deal is also crucial because China has been making aggressive forays into the Indian Ocean Region while expanding its naval forces, in order to become a "blue water navy".

6. Mission Shakti/ Anti-satellite technology

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the DRDO-developed anti-satellite system A-SAT successfully destroyed a live satellite in the Low Earth Orbit.
- With this test, dubbed as Mission Shakti, India is only the fourth country after the U.S., Russia and China to have the technology.

What are anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons?

- They are missile-based systems to attack moving satellites. So far the United States, China and Russia were the only ones who've reported the ability to shoot down space objects from ground or airborne sources.
- The development of such systems has a long history — fuelled by the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union
- In the Cold War/Space Race era, 1985 was the last time that the United States had used an anti-satellite system to destroy its P-781 satellite that had instruments aboard to study solar radiation.

Why was the test done now?

- The test was done to verify that India has the capability to safeguard our space assets. It is the Government of India's responsibility to defend the country's interests in outer space.
 - * Satellites are extremely critical infrastructure of any country these days. A large number of crucial applications are now satellite-based.
 - * These include navigation systems, communication networks, broadcasting, banking systems, stock markets, weather forecasting, disaster management, land and ocean mapping and monitoring tools, and military applications.

* Destroying a satellite would render these applications useless. It can cripple enemy infrastructure, and bring it down on knees, without causing any threat to human lives.

- The tests were done after India acquired the required degree of confidence to ensure its success, and reflects the intention of the government to enhance India's national security.
- The test, however, can be carried out only on one's own satellite. There are a large number of satellites currently in space, many of which have outlived their utility and orbiting aimlessly. One such satellite was chosen for the test.



Steps taken by India to conduct the test

- As is mandatory for any missile test, India did issue a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) to airline authorities across the world informing them about an impending missile test. This notice does not have to specify the kind of missile being tested, only the flight path and the region affected, so that airborne systems are able to avoid it.
 - * NOTAM: It is a notice filed with an aviation authority to alert aircraft pilots of potential hazards along a flight route or at a location that could affect the safety of the flight

Examples

- Anti-satellite weapons came back into popular currency after China conducted an anti-satellite missile test in 2007.
 - * The target was a Chinese weather satellite — the FY-1C — that sailed at an altitude of 865 kilometres (537 mi).
- The United States launched 'Operation Burnt Frost', the code name to intercept and destroy a non-functioning U.S. National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) satellite named USA-193.

What are India's capabilities so far?

- While 'Mission Shakti' may have targeted an object in outer space, India has long developed the ability to intercept incoming missiles.

- In 2011, a modified Prithvi missile, mimicked the trajectory of a ballistic missile with a 600-km range. Radars at different locations swung into action, tracking the "enemy" missile, constructing its trajectory and passing on the information in real time to the Mission Control Centre (MCC) to launch the interceptor, an Advanced Air Defence (AAD) missile.
- It had a directional warhead to go close to the adversarial missile before exploding to inflict damage on it.

What are Low-Earth Orbit satellites?

- The Indian satellite that was shot down was a Low-Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite. These are satellites roughly at an altitude of 2,000 kilometres from the earth and that's the region where majority of satellites are concentrated.
- A database from the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-government organization based in the United States, says that there are at least 5 known Indian satellites in LEO: India PiSat, Resourcesat 2, Radar Imaging Satellites 1 and 2 and SRMsat.

Does the test create space debris?

- The test was done in the lower atmosphere to ensure that there is no space debris. Whatever debris that is generated will decay and fall back onto the earth within weeks.

Is India entering into an arms race in outer space?

- India has no intention of entering into an arms race in outer space. India has always maintained that space must be used only for peaceful purposes. India is against the weaponization of Outer Space and support international efforts to reinforce the safety and security of space based assets.
- India believes that Outer space is the common heritage of humankind and it is the responsibility of all space-faring nations to preserve and promote the benefits flowing from advances made in space technology and its applications for all.
- India is a party to all the major international treaties relating to Outer Space. India already implements a number of Transparency and Confidence Building Measures (TCBMs) – including registering space objects with the UN register, pre-launch notifications, measures in harmony with the UN Space Mitigation Guidelines, participation in Inter Agency Space Debris Coordination (IADC) activities with regard to space debris management, undertaking SOPA (Space Object Proximity Awareness and COLA (Collision Avoidance) Analysis and numerous international cooperation activities, including hosting the UN affiliated Centre for Space and Science Technology Education in Asia and Pacific. India has been participating in all sessions of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

- India supported UNGA resolution 69/32 on No First Placement of Weapons on Outer Space. India's sees the No First Placement of weapons in outer space as only an interim step and not a substitute for concluding substantive legal measures to ensure the prevention of an arms race in outer space, which should continue to be a priority for the international community.
- India supports the substantive consideration of the issue of Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) in the Conference on Disarmament where it has been on the agenda since 1982.

What is the international law on weapons in outer space?

- The principal international Treaty on space is the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. India is a signatory to this treaty, and ratified it in 1982. The Outer Space Treaty prohibits only weapons of mass destruction in outer space, not ordinary weapons.
- India expects to play a role in the future in the drafting of international law on prevention of an arms race in outer space including inter alia on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space in its capacity as a major space faring nation with proven space technology.
- India is not in violation of any international law or Treaty to which it is a Party or any national obligation.

Is this the only way to target enemy satellites?

- Countries have explored alternative options of making enemy satellites dysfunctional, options which do not involve direct destruction of the target or creation of the debris. For example, technologies have been developed to jam the communication from the satellites by interfering with its radio signals. This can be attempted during the uplink or the downlink.
- Another option that has been explored is the possibility of sending satellites that could just approach a target close enough to deviate it from its selected orbit, without destroying it. Several countries and organisations including China, Japan, Russia and the European Space Agency are said to be working on developing these 'close proximity' anti-satellite technologies.
- The third option is the possible use of ground-based lasers to 'dazzle' the sensors of the satellites and make them at least "partially blind" so that they are unable to work efficiently.

Significance

- The use of ASAT is seen as crossing new frontier just like India's 1998 nuclear tests. The technology is aimed at destroying, if necessary, satellites owned by enemy countries.
- The fact that this anti-satellite technology is indigenously developed adds to India's credentials, given that for many decades India was kept away from acquiring key technologies, forcing the country to develop its own space and nuclear capabilities.

- The anti-satellite space technology shows India's focus on security challenges, emanating beyond Pakistan.
- The acquisition of this technology is expected to have spin-offs that India can exploit for commercial use, both domestic and globally.
- This was required in order to avoid some of the mistakes that India had done in other areas, such as the nuclear domain. India refused to test its nuclear capability in the 1960s, thus being left out of the Non Proliferation Treaty's category of "nuclear weapon state".

* Clearly, India does not want an NPT for space to be developed and then be banned from developing and demonstrating its ASAT capability.

Concerns

- There are many space-faring nations (and communities like the European consortium) with far greater numbers of assets in space, but none is considering the need to defend them using ASAT systems. Undoubtedly, competing with China seems to be the only driver for this test.
- * However, considering that China is far ahead in strategic technologies, including Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV), Directed-Energy weapons and MaRVs (manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles), it would be unwise for India to seek to match China on a competing scale.
- As a developing nation with scarce resources for defence technological development, India cannot afford to divert massive resources on fictitious and hypothetical scenarios like space wars. Greater emphasis should, instead, be on addressing formidable gaps in India's air-delivery platforms, air defence and propelling the mid-course interception capability towards fruition.
- The MEA document states that the test was done "to verify ... the capability to safeguard our space assets." This is a problematic contention. An ASAT in itself is not a defensive system that could 'safeguard' any space asset. Instead, it is an offensive system that could solely be used for retribution in response to an attack on India's space assets. In that sense, the capability can only be used as a deterrent against a potential rival China

Conclusion

- Now that India has demonstrated its ASAT capability, it should take a proactive role in shaping the norms, rules and regulations in this area. Having crossed the rubicon, it can join the conversations along with other established space powers to ensure that space remains weapons-free

7. Naval Commanders Conference

- The conference is the apex forum within the Service for interaction between the Naval Commanders.

- The Chief of the Naval Staff, with the Commanders-in-Chief, will review major operational, materiel, logistics, HR, training and administrative activities undertaken during the previous six months and deliberate upon the course to be steered in the ensuing six months.
- It will provide the higher naval leadership a forum to discuss the emerging challenges in the maritime domain and fine tune the strategies for responding to the evolving geo-strategic environment.
- The conference also serves as a platform for institutionalized interaction of Naval Commanders with senior Government Officials.

8. The many and different faces of terror

Introduction

- Terrorism is a well-recognised form of asymmetric warfare, and has been around for centuries.
- Some terror strikes tend to resonate more than others, for reasons that are inexplicable.
- The Munich Olympics massacre in 1972, the 9/11 terror attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, and the November 26, 2008 terror attack on multiple targets in Mumbai are, for instance, more deeply etched in the memories of people than many other terror events.

Radical Islamist extremism

- Radical Islamist extremism has been the dominant terror narrative, post the 1980s. This was possibly an off-shoot of the decade-long Afghan war (1979-1989),
- Over time, terrorist outfits seemed to gain greater transnational reach, and were no longer fettered to geographical locations.
- New organisations, such as al-Qaeda and its acolytes, as also the Islamic State (IS), gained pre-eminence among a growing multitude of terror groups.
- Regional variants such as Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, the Pakistan-sponsored Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in South Asia, and the Boko Haram in Africa were no less deadly.

Western Extremism

- More recently, especially in the West, a new narrative has been unfolding. Sporting different labels, extreme right-wing elements are proving to be no less violent and dangerous than jihadi terrorist groups.
- They appear, at present, less organised than many outfits, and the violence they perpetrate seems more random.

How do they conduct their operations?

- Terrorists are further honing their skills, and are able to strike at targets at will.
- Cross-pollination of concepts and ideas among terror groups, and in many cases even pooling of resources, has made this possible.

Calling an end to era of IS dominance?

- It would, hence, be premature to celebrate the decline of terrorism, based on the so-called demise of the IS. The territory controlled by the IS Caliphate may have shrunk dramatically compared to 2014, but its obituary cannot be written just yet.
- The IS remains a fount of support and inspiration for several hundreds of fighters across Asia, Africa and Europe.
- Many IS networks are still operating clandestinely. Many of their dispersed supporters are ready to revive their activities once the pressure relaxes.
- There are unconfirmed reports already that the IS has directed several of its recruits to return to their country of origin and strengthen the nucleus of IS groups there.
- Developments in technology, information and doctrine will in all likelihood alter the character of 21st century terrorism and can be used as tool of appeasing and radicalizing youths. Internet-enabled terrorism, and resort to remote plotting, will grow as the 21st century advances.

Conclusion

- Counter-terrorism experts will need to lay stress on multi-domain operations and information technologies, and undertake 'terror gaming' to wrestle with an uncertain future that is already upon us.

9. The road to Kashmir

Context

- J&K administration has shut a 270-km stretch of the national highway from Udhampur to Baramulla to civilians on two days of the week
- On Sundays and Wednesdays, between 4 a.m. and 5 p.m., only pre-determined categories of civilian traffic will be allowed on the highway with clearance from the authorities. For the rest of the time, the highway will be given over to the movement of troops.

Details

- The ban, which is to last till May 31, is supposedly to enable the orderly conduct of the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir
- The government has cited the recent suicide bombing of a security forces convoy in Pulwama — which killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel — as the reason for restricting traffic

Importance of highway to Civilians

- The highway is the lifeline of the Kashmir Valley — not just the only road link that connects Kashmir to the outside world but also the key highway that connects Srinagar with the southern and northern districts of the Valley.

- * The highway passes through five of the Valley's 10 districts, and highways to at least two more districts branch out from it.
- * So it directly and indirectly, impacts a population of over 69 lakh.
- * Economy- People on the streets, food vendors, sellers of fruits who make their livelihood on this busy highway their life will be suffocating

- In many cases, avoiding the stretch would greatly multiply the time and distance between two points.
- Shutting the highway during daytime would mean that most government and private offices, banks, schools and colleges would have to remain shut
- At least seven important hospitals including three big government hospitals — District Hospital Baramulla, Trauma Hospital, Pattan, and SKIMS Medical College Hospital at Bemina, Srinagar — are located on the national highway.

This is the first time in three decades of militancy in Kashmir that the highway has been ordered closed to civilian traffic for two days of the week.

Conclusion

- The effect of any response to the Pulwama attack ought not to be an increased alienation that places troops and local people in an us-versus-them timetable.
- It must, instead, be a doubling up of the security protocol to make life more secure and hassle-free for civilians and soldiers alike.

10. Veer Parivar App

Context

- President Ram Nath Kovind launched a mobile application for families of personnel killed in the line of duty

Details

- The app will act as an interface between Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) authorities and the next of kin of a slain personnel
- It will render all assistance to them with regard to issuance of ex gratia, pensionary benefits and information about all welfare schemes of the government meant for them
- The android-based app will be installed by the force's officials securely on the phone of the families and will not be available over the app stores

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. A struggle to breathe

Context:

- The National Capital Region's pollution levels make it to the headlines every year. Every October to December, stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana, smog arising from industries, and motor vehicle emissions increase the air quality index (AQI) of Delhi to the hazardous level of 450.
- The economic loss for India in the last five years due to the exposure to crop burning is about 1.7% of the country's GDP. Annually, this exposure to pollution costs Delhi, Haryana and Punjab around 2 lakh crore.

Details:

- The author is of the view that despite the alarming level of pollution, neither the Union government nor the Delhi government has taken significant steps to plan out a long-term solution. Even the interim Budget took no significant step to tackle this issue.
- A study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water found that the average number of vehicles plying on the roads daily increased by 10% during the odd-even period in January 2016 compared to the last week of December 2015. This increase was mainly due to a 17% increase in two-wheelers, 12% increase in three-wheelers, 22% increase in taxis and 138% rise in the number of private buses.
- Another study published in Current Science found that the odd-even scheme led to an increase in emissions as the median concentration of 13 out of the 16 gases measured were higher in the morning hours and afternoon hours on days when the scheme was enforced.

The author envisages that the government needs to take more radical steps to curb pollution like:

- Government should find alternatives to stubble burning and impose strict sanctions in case of contravention of any ban on the practice.
- Impose a blanket ban on firecrackers.
- Impose a blanket ban on all vehicles exceeding prescribed tailgate emission standards.
- Legislate stricter norms for fuels.
- Open toll roads where trucks should be excluded and high-occupancy vehicles exempted from the toll
- Provide separate bus lanes to reduce congestion
- Create a separate fund in the Budget to specifically deal with this crisis
- Provide agricultural subsidies to farmers to disincentivise crop burning.

- Improve the drainage system; and incentivise the use of renewable energy.

Conclusion:

- The author concludes that Apart from the courts, none of the other organs of the state has shown any readiness to deal with the pollution crisis. Meanwhile, until the government responds, NGOs and social workers should step in to tackle this issue through their own programmes and campaigns. In this election season, it is imperative for political parties to make this issue a priority, for pollution doesn't only affect us but our children, the generations to come, and our planet.

2. Earth Day

Background

- On April 22, 1970, millions of people took to the streets to protest the negative impacts of 150 years of industrial development.
- Smog was becoming deadly and evidence was growing that pollution led to developmental delays in children.
- Biodiversity was in decline as a result of the heavy use of pesticides and other pollutants.

Details

- It is an annual event celebrated on April 22
- Worldwide, various events are held to demonstrate support for environmental protection.
- Earth Day Network's mission is to diversify, educate and activate the environmental movement worldwide.
- It is a day of political action and civic participation. People march, sign petitions, meet with their elected officials, plant trees, clean up their towns and roads.

- * Corporations and governments use it to make pledges and announce sustainability measures.

3. Forest fires threatening Odisha's flora and fauna

Context:

- Odisha had registered a sudden jump in forest fires across the State resulting in massive damage to flora and fauna.

Details:

- As many as 5,332 fire spots had been noticed since November 1 last, the beginning of forest fire season, in the State.
- The month of March had alone registered 4,495 fire spots.

- As per statistics generated by SNPP (Suomi National Polar-orbiting Partnership) satellite, only 385 fire spots were recorded February while in January, only 55 fire incidences were detected.
- The month of April started with 11 fires on Monday as detected by Moderate resolution Imaging spectroradiometer (MODIS) with a resolution of 1 km.

Effects of Forest fire:

- The forest fires have caused a huge loss to the timber and other fruit and leaf-bearing trees and creepers of the forest.
- They also destroy wildlife and their habitat.
- Nests and eggs of ground-dwelling birds are lost.
- Reptiles also lose their young ones due to forest fires.

Relaying information:

- When a fire anywhere in the world is detected by NASA's MODIS (Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer) and VIIRS (Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite) satellites, the Forest Survey of India (FSI) analyses the data by overlaying the digitised boundaries of forest areas to pinpoint the location to the exact forest compartment.
- The FSI relays news of the fire to the concerned State, so that the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) in charge of the forest where the fire is raging is informed

Meanwhile, news of the fire would have reached the DFO from his guards in watchtowers and on patrol.

- The DFO decides whom to deploy. Usually, there is a master fire control room which is informed and which sends firefighters from local fire crew stations to fight the blaze.

Forest fire management:

- Fire could only be tamed at the initial stage before it became a conflagration preventing anybody from even approaching it due to the intense heat generate.
- Prevention of human-caused fires through education and environmental modification. It will include silvicultural activities, engineering works, people participation, and education and enforcement. It is proposed that more emphasis be given to people participation through Joint Forest Fire Management for fire prevention.
- Prompt detection of fires through a well-coordinated network of observation points, efficient ground patrolling, and communication networks. Remote sensing technology is to be given due importance in fire detection. For successful fire management and administration, a National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) and Fire Forecasting System are to be developed in the country.
- Fast initial attack measures.
- Vigorous follow-up action.

- Introducing a forest fuel modification system at strategic points.
- Firefighting resources.

MODIS:

- MODIS (or Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer) is a key instrument aboard the Terra (originally known as EOS AM-1) and Aqua (originally known as EOS PM-1) satellites.
- They are designed to provide measurements in large-scale global dynamics including changes in Earth's cloud cover, radiation budget and processes occurring in the oceans, on land, and in the lower atmosphere.
- Terra's orbit around the Earth is timed so that it passes from north to south across the equator in the morning, while Aqua passes south to north over the equator in the afternoon.
- Terra MODIS and Aqua MODIS are viewing the entire Earth's surface every 1 to 2 days, acquiring data in 36 spectral bands, or groups of wavelengths (see MODIS Technical Specifications).
- These data will improve our understanding of global dynamics and processes occurring on the land, in the oceans, and in the lower atmosphere.
- MODIS is playing a vital role in the development of validated, global, interactive Earth system models able to predict global change accurately enough to assist policy makers in making sound decisions concerning the protection of our environment.

4. Hindon River Pollution

- Hindon River is a tributary of Yamuna River.
- The rain-fed Hindon originates in the lower Himalayas of neighboring Uttarakhand. Joined by its two tributaries – Kali and Krishni.
 - * Kali River, which originates in the Doon Valley and travels to merge with Hindon River, before it merges with the Yamuna River.
 - * The Kali River is also highly polluted and adds to the pollution of the Hindon, as it passes through populated and industrial belt of Uttar Pradesh.
- The river was once considered to be so clean that its water was believed to cure the Kaali Khansi (bad cough).

Context:

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Uttar Pradesh government to take steps in curbing water pollution around industrial areas in the State. A report was furnished by the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board stating that industrial effluents are contaminating the Hindon River.

Details

- The industries of western Uttar Pradesh discharge their effluents, often with no treatment, directly into the hindon River.

- This heavy loading characterizes the presence of toxic contaminants and for biological diversity of river ecology.
- Dissolved oxygen levels are zero throughout the length of this river.



Concerns:

- Chemical pollution of surface water can create health risks, because such waterways are often used directly as drinking water sources or connected with shallow wells used for drinking water.
 - * Now, the river is so polluted that it is nearly opaque. As per the government and other authorities, all the villagers living along the banks of the river have been warned not to drink its water as it has become a major health hazard.
- Vegetables and crops are grown using this polluted water because farmers have no other choice
 - * In addition, waterways have important roles for washing and cleaning, for fishing and fish farming, and for recreation.
- Direct contamination occurs from badly designed hazardous waste sites or from industrial sites.

Way forward:

- Requisite infrastructure for scientific discharge of effluents must be made mandatory.
- Consumption or usage of a polluting product must be reduced.
- Wastes, discharges and disposals of a pollutant must be treated before letting out.
- Interventions pertaining to environmental hazards are often more sustainable if they address the driving forces behind the pollution at the community level rather than attempt to deal with specific exposures at the individual level.

5. Indian bullfrog / *Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*

Background

- Bullfrogs are found all over mainland India, but in the unique ecosystem of the islands it becomes a major threat.
- Unlike the mainland, resources on the islands are scarce for big animals, while natural calamities are more frequent.
- The wildlife here has evolved in a miniature setting: there are no large herbivores

Context

- But, Indian bullfrogs introduced in the Andaman islands are invasive, and eat native wildlife including fish and lizards.
- Now, experiments reveal that the frogs take to this invasive behaviour early in their lives. Even in the developmental stages, the large bullfrog tadpoles eat other native frog tadpoles, finds a study.

Details

- IUCN: Least Concern
- The bullfrogs are prolific breeders: they have short breeding seasons, and each egg clutch can contain up to 5,750 eggs. Its tadpoles are carnivorous and eat other tadpoles (including their own species).

6. Lord Howe Island Coral's

Context

- According to Australian scientists the world's southernmost coral reef in Lord Howe Island has been hit by bleaching
- The corals off Lord Howe Island — some 600 km offshore from Sydney — were affected by elevated temperatures in summer, despite escaping severe bleaching that damaged the Great Barrier Reef in 2016 and 2017.

Details

- Lord Howe Island was named a UNESCO world heritage site in 1982.

- The 145,000-hectare Lord Howe Island Marine Park is the closest coral reef to a pole and is home to many species of marine animals not found anywhere else.
- The recent bleaching in the area is proof global warming is affecting coral reefs around the world, reaching even regions that normally do not see similar events.

Corals

- The branch or mound that we often call "a coral" is actually made up of thousands of tiny animals called polyps.
- Each polyp has a saclike body and a mouth that is encircled by stinging tentacles.
- The polyp uses calcium carbonate (limestone) from seawater to build a hard, cup-shaped skeleton. This skeleton protects the soft, delicate body of the polyp.
- Corals have tiny plant-like organisms living in their tissue. The corals couldn't survive without these microscopic algae—called zooxanthellae
- The corals that build reefs are known as "hard" or "reef-building" corals.
- Soft corals, such as sea fans and sea whips, do not produce reefs; they are flexible organisms that sometimes resemble plants or trees.
 - * Soft corals do not have stony skeletons and do not always have zooxanthellae. They can be found in both tropical seas and in cooler, darker parts of the ocean.

- Zooxanthellae supply the coral with glucose, glycerol, and amino acids, which are the products of photosynthesis.

What is coral Bleaching?

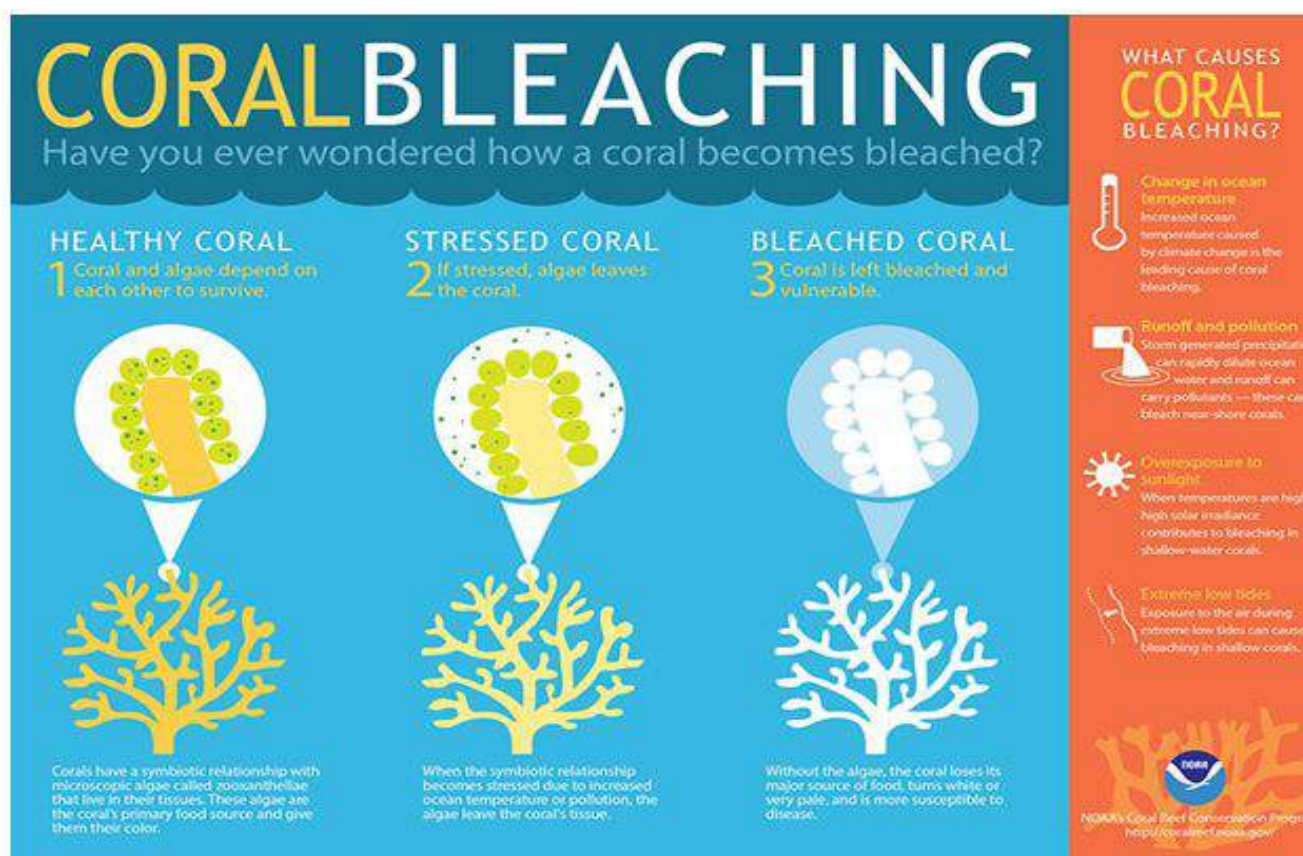
- When corals are stressed by changes in conditions resulting in abnormal environmental conditions such as warmer sea temperatures, light, or nutrients, they expel the symbiotic algae living in their tissues, causing them to turn completely white.

7. Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is a wildlife sanctuary and reservoir located in Sangareddy district of Telangana
 - * The reservoir, located in the sanctuary, provides drinking water to Hyderabad and Secunderabad
- Originally a crocodile sanctuary, today more than 70 species of birds are spotted here and is home for the vulnerable species Mugger Crocodile.
 - * Mugger Crocodile IUCN: Vulnerable

Manjira River

- It is a tributary of the river Godavari.
- Manjira is the main river which has its origin near the Gaukhadi Village of Beed district.
- Terna River is an important tributary of the Manjira River



Context

- The Manjeera barrage and the Singur reservoir going dry this summer has forced the crocodiles from the Manjeera Wildlife sanctuary to search for any place where water is logged.

8. Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is a wildlife sanctuary in Uttarakhand
- The sanctuary is part of the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL), a forest zone that stretches from Uttarakhand in India and extends into Nepal.
- It is situated close to the Nandhaur river in Kumaon region

Context

- With the number of tigers steadily on the rise at Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttarakhand, the authorities feel upgrading it to a tiger reserve is necessary for the conservation of tigers at the facility.

How will it help?

- The State government can play a role in its elevation as a tiger reserve so that it gets central government funds and the expertise of national level zoological scientists to conserve the growing population of tigers at the sanctuary

9. National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**Context**

- The Union Environment Ministry has constituted a committee to implement the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), which aims to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20%-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

- The committee will be chaired by the Secretary, Union Environment Ministry and has among its members the Joint Secretary (Thermal), Ministry of Power; Director-General, The Energy Resources Institute (TERI), the Delhi-based think-tank; and Professor Sachidananda Tripathi, Indian Institute of Technology-Kanpur (IIT-K).
- The NCAP unveiled in January is envisaged as a scheme to provide the States and the Centre with a framework to combat air pollution.
- The committee would be headquartered in New Delhi
- Its remit includes ensuring inter-ministerial organisation and cooperation, sharing information and resolving issues that could arise between ministries.
- The committee would also give overall guidance and directions to effectively implement the programmes.
- The NCAP is envisioned as a five-year action plan with 2019 as the first year. There would be a review every five years.

Details:

- The World Health Organisation's (WHO) database on air pollution over the years has listed Tier I and Tier II Indian cities as some of the most polluted places in the world.
- In 2018, 14 of the world's 15 most polluted cities were in India.
- States in which the cities are located are expected to produce plans that include increasing the number of monitoring stations, providing technology support, conducting source apportionment studies, and strengthening enforcement.
- For achieving the NCAP targets, the cities would be expected to calculate the reduction in pollution, keeping 2017's average annual PM levels as the base year.
- The NCAP requires cities to implement specific measures such as "ensuring roads are pothole-free to improve traffic flow and thereby reduce dust" (within 60 days) or "ensuring strict action against unauthorised brick kilns" (within 30 days).

Criticisms:

- Experts have criticised the lack of mandatory targets and the challenge of inadequate enforcement by cities.
- It doesn't specify an exact date for when these obligations kick in.

10. NGT seeks report on waste tyres used in factories**Context**

- There was an appeal by Social Action for Forest and Environment seeking a ban on illegal pyrolysis industries that use waste tyres as raw material for the production of fuel oil
 - * Pyro "fire" and Lysis "separating".
 - * It is the thermal decomposition/ heating of materials at a very temperature for separating things or using it as a tool to generate an end product

What did the Plea say?

- The plea had said that as a result of the usage of waste tyres in the industry, toxic pollutants are emitted that affect public health adversely.
 - * The workers employed in such unscientific practices suffer from neurological disorders, skin diseases, cancer etc.
- It wanted NGT to Direct the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, the CPCB and the State pollution control boards in consultation with other scientific agencies to develop a monitoring mechanism to ensure that waste tyres imported in the country are verified through scientific means and through a robust monitoring framework

- * UK exports “thousands of tonnes” of used tyres to India. Most of these tyres are used by pyrolysis plants to produce fuel.

- The petition also sought directions to concerned agencies to ensure proper implementation of the provisions under the Hazardous Waste Rules, 2016 which state that it is “mandatory for the occupiers or actual users to maintain records of hazardous and other wastes”.

NGT

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to submit a report pertaining to the remedial measures required.

Alternatives

- Used tyres can be recycled through cleaner processes than pyrolysis.
- Through a technology called CRMB (Crum Rubber Modified Bitumen), rubber from used tyres is added to bitumen with crushed stones to lay roads. While this process was implemented by the Centre until 2010, it has been neglected since.
- Contractors are deliberately avoiding this technology. The motive, it said, was to make more money by using the tyres to produce fuel through pyrolysis and other processes.

Hazardous Waste Management Rules, 2016

- The new Hazardous Waste Rules will ensure resource recovery and disposal of hazardous waste in environmentally sound manner.
- The Rules are environment and industry- friendly.
- For the first time, Rules have been made to distinguish between Hazardous Waste and other wastes.

Hazardous Waste

- Hazardous waste means any waste, which by reason of characteristics, such as physical, chemical, biological, reactive, toxic, flammable, explosive or corrosive, causes danger to health, or environment. It comprises the waste generated during the manufacturing processes of the commercial products such as industries involved in petroleum refining, production of pharmaceuticals, petroleum, paint, aluminium, electronic products etc.
- As per the information furnished by CPCB in the year 2015, the total hazardous waste generation in the country is 7.46 million metric tonnes per annum from about 44,000 industries.

Other wastes include:

- Waste tyre, paper waste, metal scrap, used electronic items, etc. and are recognized as a resource for recycling and reuse.

Rules

- Waste Management hierarchy in the sequence of priority of prevention, minimization, reuse, recycling, recovery, co-processing; and safe disposal has been incorporated.

- Procedure has been simplified to merge all the approvals as a Single Window Clearance for setting up of hazardous waste disposal facility and import of other wastes.
- All the forms under the rules for permission, import/export, filing of annual returns, transportation, etc. have been revised significantly, indicating the stringent approach for management of such hazardous and other wastes with simultaneous simplification of procedure.
- The basic necessity of infrastructure to safeguard the health and environment from waste processing industry has been prescribed as Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs), specific to waste type, which has to be complied by the stakeholders and ensured by SPCB/PCC while granting such authorisation.
- The import of metal scrap, paper waste and various categories of electrical and electronic equipment for re-use purpose has been exempted from the need of obtaining Ministry's permission.

Importance of Proper Hazardous Waste Management

- Scientific disposal of hazardous waste through collection, storage, packaging, transportation and treatment, in an environmentally sound manner minimises the adverse impact on human health and on the environment.

11. Periyar River Polluted

Context

- Water in the Periyar River has turned pitch black in one stream and milky in other places

Reasons for discoloration

- It was due to the poor quality of water as a result of eutrophication.
- When excessive nutrients reach the waterbody, it will lead to algal bloom.
 - * A few days later, algae will die and decay, resulting in a foul smell and discoloration of water.
- Huge quantities of organic load in the form of sewage from nearby townships are regularly reaching the river system.
- Colour-change is due to excessive discharge of pollutants from the industrial units functioning in the area.
 - * Hindustan Insecticides Ltd (HIL), FACT, Merchem and Indian Rare Earths (IRE)
 - * Major pollutants: DDT, endosulphan, chlorobenzenes and metals like manganese, vanadium, zinc and chromium
- Water in some reaches of the river system has been stagnant. Reduced water flow in the system has added to the deteriorating water quality

Concerns

- The river provides Drinking Water to Kochi city and adjoining areas and this has been a cause for worry for residents.
- Decrease in dissolved oxygen level has caused several fish-kills in the past few years.
- The river provides water for irrigation and domestic use, besides supporting fishery.

Way forward:

- The river flow should not be restricted by closing the bund so that the natural pollutants will flow away from the water.
- Excessive discharge of pollutants from an unauthorized industrial unit functioning upstream must be controlled.
- Areas near industrial units are to be regularly monitored.

Periyar River:

- Periyar (meaning: big river) is the longest river and the river with the largest discharge potential in the Indian state of Kerala.
- It is one of the few perennial rivers in the region and provides drinking water for several major towns.
- The Periyar is of utmost significance to the economy of Kerala.
- It generates a significant proportion of Kerala's electrical power via the Idukki Dam and flows along a region of industrial and commercial activity.
- The river also provides water for irrigation and domestic use throughout its course besides supporting a rich fishery.
- Due to these reasons, the river has been named the "Lifeline of Kerala".
- Kochi city, in the vicinity of the river mouth, draws its water supply from Aluva, an upstream site sufficiently free of seawater intrusion.
- Twenty five percent of Kerala's industries are along the banks of river Periyar.
- The source of the Periyar lies high in the Western Ghats.

12. Pyrenees Mountains

- It is a range of mountains in southwest Europe that forms a natural border between Spain and France.
- The range separates the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of continental Europe

Context

- Scientists have found that a secluded region in the Pyrenees Mountains - previously considered pristine wilderness - is covered with airborne Microplastics.

Details

- They estimate that each day an average of 365 tiny plastic fragments or fibres settled on every square metre of land.
- The research suggested Microplastics were being transported by the wind.

**13. Riverbank erosion****Introduction**

Beki River

- It is also known as the Kurissu River in Bhutan
- The soil erosion of Beki river has become a major problem of flowing two districts Barpeta and Baksa of Assam

Displacement and loss of land

- Land, the most important asset possessed by any rural household, forms the basis of economic and social identity of the household. The bank erosion rendered the households landless and homeless and the families face involuntary displacement
- Their hitherto primary occupation, agriculture, takes a fatal blow. While the development induced displacement tend to displace people once, the families affected by bank erosion are subjected to multiple displacement.

Livestock

- The loss of land and the resulting displacement also reduces the livestock holding.
- Livestock is usually seen as a liquid asset on which the rural household can fall back during times of crisis.
- But as agricultural land is lost to the river, the availability of fodder also gets reduced. Hence keeping livestock becomes an expensive proposition.

Occupational insecurity

- The landlessness among the bank erosion affected community breeds certain kind of occupational insecurity.
- As people are forced to move out of agriculture and get engaged in labor or small business, there is an increased demand for family labor.
- The demand increases with the increase in the size of the household.
- In the absence of proper skill training, a large number of the affected people, who are also young, are forced to enter the unorganized labor market and undertake migration. This disrupts the normal functioning of a household.
- Children are often the prime victims of this because they have to dropout from schools following the relocation of the household

Conclusion

- There is a pressing need for declaring riverbank erosion as a disaster. The action on bank erosion is currently restricted to bank strengthening through reinforced concrete or bamboo porcupines.
- But one needs to take a people-centric approach for addressing the problems emanating from river bank erosion that would contribute to the resilience building of the erosion-affected people through the provision of compensation, rehabilitation and an emphasis on human resource development amongst the erosion affected population through skill building initiatives.

14. SAMOA Pathway

- Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a group of small island countries that tend to share similar sustainable development challenges, including small but growing populations, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments.
- The SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (S.A.M.O.A) Pathway is an international framework that was developed as the outcome of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS Conference)
- The Samoa Pathway recognizes the adverse impacts of climate change and sea-level rise on SIDS' efforts to achieve sustainable development as well as to their survival and viability, and addresses economic development, food security, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and ocean management, among other issues.

15. Sehuencas Water Frog

- IUCN: Vulnerable
- It is endemic to Bolivia
- Its natural habitats are subtropical or tropical moist montane forests, rivers, and freshwater marshes.
- Sehuencas frog is completely aquatic

Amplexus

- It is the mating position for frogs where the male holds the female until he can fertilize her eggs as she lays them.
- Some species of frog need to go into amplexus for weeks or even months

Threats

- A combination of climate change, habitat destruction, contamination, chytridio mycosis (a fungal disease) and the introduction of invasive trout provoked the abrupt demise of many aquatic frog species in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru

16. Solar e-waste**Context**

- According to the study by Bridge to India (BTI), an energy consultancy firm, by 2050, India will likely stare at a pile of a new category of electronic waste, namely solar e-waste.
- Currently, India's e-waste rules have no laws mandating solar cell manufacturers to recycle or dispose waste from this sector.

Stats

- India is among the leading markets for solar cells in the world, buoyed by the government's commitment to install 100 GW of solar power by 2022.
- So far, India has installed solar cells for about 28 GW and this is largely from imported solar PV cells.
- India's PV (photovoltaic) waste volume is estimated to grow to 200,000 tonnes by 2030 and around 1.8 million tonnes by 2050

Components of Solar cells

- Solar cell modules are made by processing sand to make silicon, casting silicon ingots, using wafers to create cells and then assembling them to make modules.
- India's domestic manufacturers are largely involved in assembling cells and modules.
- These modules are 80% glass and aluminium, and non-hazardous.
- Other materials used, including polymers, metals, metallic compounds and alloys, and are classified as potentially hazardous

Issue Area

- India is poorly positioned to handle PV waste as it doesn't yet have policy guidelines
- Lack of a policy framework is coupled with the fact that even basic recycling facilities for laminated glass and e-waste are unavailable.
- The solar sector continues to grow robustly; there is no clarity on solar waste management in India

Power point

India faces a major solar e-waste threat as it plans to tap the sun in a big way using photovoltaic (PV) cells to generate electricity

**What constitute solar e-waste?**

- Photovoltaic cells that have reached their life cycle and haven't been recycled
- They contain potentially hazardous chromium, silicon tetrachloride, cadmium, selenium, and sulfur hexafluoride

What is the threat perception?

- Globally, limited facilities exist to recycle solar cells
- India's PV waste volume is estimated to grow to 200,000 tonnes by 2030
- The PV volume may rise to as much as 1.8 million tonnes by 2050

17. Southern River Terrapins (Batagur Affinis)

- The species still known locally in Cambodia as the "Royal Turtle" because it was historically protected by a royal decree and the eggs were considered a delicacy reserved for the king.
- IUCN: Critically Endangered
- They are found in Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia.

Threats

- These species were once feared extinct because of hunting, trafficking and illegal sand mining.
- Furthermore young terrapins are also vulnerable to predators such as water birds and monitor lizards, and to accidental entanglement in fishing gear.

Context

- Twenty critically endangered 'Royal Turtles' were released into a remote stretch of a Cambodian river

18. Waste Management Policy**Introduction**

- In India, less than 60% of waste is collected from households and only 15% of urban waste is processed.
- Humans generate vast and tonnes of waste, a sizeable portion of which is disposed in landfills and through waste-to-energy incinerators.

- * An apparatus for burning waste material, especially industrial waste, at high temperatures until it is reduced to ash.

- However, billions of tonnes of garbage, including microplastics, never make it to landfills or incinerators and end up in the oceans.

Concerns

- This garbage chokes marine life and disturbs zooplankton, which are vital to the elimination of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Landfills are seedbeds of methane and other greenhouse gases, which contribute to global warming.
- These toxic chemicals poison the soil and their leached run-off makes its way into the oceans.
- And while they do generate energy, waste incinerators cause health issues such as cancer.
- In India, nearly 60% of the household waste is wet organic waste, with low calorific value. This makes options such as waste-to-energy incinerators inefficient. We need to design incinerators that are suited to Indian conditions.

There are several problems in India in how waste is treated.

- First, segregation of waste into organic, recyclable and hazardous categories is not enforced at source. As a result, mixed waste lands up in the landfills, where waste-pickers, in hazardous conditions, try to salvage the recyclables, which are of poor quality and quantity by then.
- Second, ideally, waste management should not be offered free of cost to residents. Only if residents pay will they realise the importance of segregation and recycling.
- Third, there is the issue of logistical contractors who are motivated to dump more garbage in landfills as their compensation is proportional to the tonnage of waste. They are also prone to illegally dump waste at unauthorised sites to reduce transportation costs.
- Fourth, and importantly, organic farming and composting are not economically attractive to the Indian farmer, as chemical pesticides are heavily subsidised, and the compost is not efficiently marketed.

Way forward

- We need a comprehensive waste management policy that stresses the need for decentralised garbage disposal practices, this will incentivize private players to participate.

19. WWF

- The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1961, working in the field of the wilderness preservation, and the reduction of human impact on the environment.

- It was formerly named the World Wildlife Fund, which remains its official name in Canada and the United States.
- WWF is the world's largest conservation organization with over five million supporters worldwide, working in more than 100 countries, supporting around 1,300 conservation and environmental projects
- The Living Planet Report is published every two years by WWF since 1998; it is based on a Living Planet Index and ecological footprint calculation.
- In addition, WWF has launched several notable worldwide campaigns including Earth Hour and Debt-for-Nature Swap.
- Its current work is organized around six areas: food, climate, freshwater, wildlife, forests, and oceans.

HEALTH ISSUES

1. 'Address the innovation deficit in neglected diseases'

- Experts opine that it is encouraging that India was reported to be the fourth largest funder of research and development (R&D) in neglected diseases as per the G Finder Survey which tracks global investments in R&D for the neglected diseases.
- This reflects the government's commitment towards addressing the innovation problem in neglected diseases.
- It is important to note that neglected diseases are mostly tropical infectious diseases, and the market size for drugs for such diseases is small due to their limited geographical incidence.

Initiative Taken up by the WHO:

- To highlight the common problem of lack of innovation for drugs, diagnostics and vaccines for this basket of diseases, WHO started addressing these as neglected diseases from late 1980s.
- Some examples of neglected diseases are malaria, tuberculosis, leishmaniasis (kala azar), dengue, leprosy, lymphatic filariasis and diarrhoeal diseases.
- Some experts opine that these diseases face an innovation deficit as they are neglected in R&D efforts of the pharmaceutical industry.
- However, it is not just the neglected diseases in the developing world that face this innovation deficit. Several rare diseases that affect the developed markets are called "orphan diseases."
- These are called orphans because the pharmaceutical industry does not find it profitable to develop and market products intended for only a small number of patients suffering from rare diseases.

Innovation model

- This innovation deficit is caused by the prevailing model of pharmaceutical innovation.
- It is important to note that drug discovery came about as a key component of modern medicine towards the end of the 19th century.
 - * Till mid-20th century, this was mostly carried out in academic settings.
 - * By the middle of the 20th century it became an endeavour that was largely driven by pharmaceutical companies.
 - * The second half of the 20th century saw consolidation of pharmaceutical entities leading to multinational pharmaceutical companies who drive innovation in the pharmaceutical sector.

- It is important to note that the business model of pharmaceutical innovation is market driven, and critics opine that governments have adopted a hands-off policy, letting the market forces to work.
- However, the outcome of this process, namely, new drugs, diagnostics or vaccines are subject to strict regulatory control by the governments.

What are Orphan diseases comprised of?

- Orphan diseases comprise both rare diseases and neglected diseases.
- They are orphans of research focus, market interest and even public health policies.
- The reasons why these diseases have been ignored for so long are better understood today. The industry-led model works well in cases of diseases with markets that ensure adequate return on investment. If the market size is not attractive, industry will not invest in such cases. This leads to market failures resulting in innovation deficit.
- It is important to note that when markets fail, public policies must be put in place to address the issue. For this reason, governments and patient organisations in the developed markets have emphasised the need for providing policy incentives to encourage innovation to develop solutions for the "orphaned" rare disease patients.

Steps that have been taken:

- Both the U.S. and European Union have policies to support drug development for orphan diseases.
- It is important to note that the U.S., the U.K., Denmark, France, Italy, Sweden and Spain have public policies for treatment of rare diseases.
- The policy approach has been to treat such diseases as a class and tailor suitable policies.

Lessons India can learn:

- India may learn from the above global examples treating neglected diseases as a class requiring special policy intervention to address the innovation deficit.
- A comprehensive policy supporting research, development and marketing and treatment of neglected disease aiming at their elimination is required if India aims to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Way Forward

- The thrust in funding research should be followed up with policies that incentivise industry to take up drug development.

- The Orphan Drugs Act of the U.S. has a basket of policies from drug development grants to tax credits, fast track approvals by regulatory agencies, seven-year market exclusivity, fee reductions for regulatory approvals to priority review vouchers.
- It is important to note that establishing a biomedical observatory which records and monitors the ongoing R&D in neglected diseases will help the government to ensure effective disbursement of the limited resources, identify research gaps and take corrective measures.
- The current thrust in internal resource generation in the national laboratories have the unintended effect of diverting research to diseases with market.
- A sustained and long-term funding commitment to neglected diseases will address this issue.
- In conclusion, if the Prime Minister's slogan of 'Jai Anusandhan' has to reach its benefits to the poor and neglected patients, there should be a comprehensive policy to address the innovation deficit in neglected diseases.

2. **Bubble Boy Disorder**

- The disorder, officially called X-linked Severe Combined Immune Deficiency (SCID-X1)
- It is a genetic disorder that causes babies to be born with little to no immune protection, making them prone to developing life-threatening infections.
- SCID-X1 is caused by a mutation in a gene called IL2RG, which is critical for normal immune function
- The condition is rare, likely affecting about 1 in 50,000 to 100,000 newborns.
- The disease can be essentially cured by a bone-marrow transplant from a sibling that is a match in terms of certain immune system proteins.

3. **Candida Auris**

- It is a fungus which preys on people with weakened immune systems, when it gets into the bloodstream, can cause dangerous infections that can be life-threatening.
 - * People with compromised or weakened immune systems are the most vulnerable. This includes elderly people, and also people who are already sick
- Scientists first identified it in 2009 in a patient in Japan.
- C. auris is often resistant to major antifungal drugs that are typically used to treat such infections.
- Some scientists cite evidence that rampant use of fungicides on crops is contributing to the surge in drug-resistant fungi infecting humans.
- Scientists say that unless more effective new medicines are developed and unnecessary use of antimicrobial drugs is sharply curbed, risk will spread to healthier populations.

4. **Data theft bid hits Ayushman Bharat**

Context

- The Ayushman Bharat is the government run health insurance programme.
- Now, there have been attempts to get illegal access to large medical data including sensitive personal information of patients which is a security breach.

Details

- Employees of the Ayushman Bharat have been contacted urging them to leak sensitive information on the available health profiles of those covered by the scheme.
- The National Health Authority — which administers the programme — has now written to all State Governments alerting them about the threat and warning that no sensitive data be shared.

Intent behind the move

- Health data is extremely sensitive and of great value to commercial and pharmaceutical companies.
- Companies would be able to identify individuals with issues and sell their products and enhance their profit margins
- They may perpetuate or instill fear thereby ask them to take multiple tests promoting medical corporatism leading to out of pocket expenditure, whereby people may knock the doors of poverty for the very fear of losing their dear and near ones

Steps taken

- The authority is now also seeking assistance from the public to help ensure that the programme stays cybersecure and that patient data and records are not compromised in any manner.
- Public appeal has been made to report such cases to @AyushmanNHA at the earliest for proper investigation and actions to mitigate any potential risk

5. **Drug-resistant diseases could kill 10 million a year by 2050**

Context

- Drug-resistant diseases could cause 10 million deaths each year by 2050, warned the UN Ad Hoc Interagency Coordinating Group on Antimicrobial Resistance in a report released.

Drug Resistance

- Drug resistance is the reduction in effectiveness of a medication such as an antimicrobial or an antineoplastic in treating a disease or condition.
- The term is used in the context of resistance that pathogens or cancers have "acquired", that is, resistance has evolved.
- Antimicrobial resistance challenge clinical care.

- When an organism is resistant to more than one drug, it is said to be multidrug-resistant.
- The development of antibiotic resistance in particular stems from the drugs targeting only specific bacterial molecules (almost always proteins). Because the drug is so specific, any mutation in these molecules will interfere with or negate its destructive effect, resulting in antibiotic resistance.
- Furthermore there is mounting concern over the abuse of antibiotics in the farming of livestock leading to development of super-resistant bacteria.

Details:

- The report states that, by 2030, antimicrobial resistance could force up to 24 million people into extreme poverty.
- Currently, at least 7,00,000 people die each year due to drug-resistant diseases, including 2,30,000 people who die from multidrug-resistant tuberculosis.
- It also noted that more and more common diseases, including respiratory tract infections, sexually transmitted infections and urinary tract infections, are becoming untreatable; lifesaving medical procedures are becoming riskier, and food systems are getting increasingly precarious.

Recommendations:

- The report noted that the world is already feeling the economic and health consequences as crucial medicines become ineffective.
- Without investment from countries in all income brackets, future generations will face the disastrous impacts of uncontrolled antimicrobial resistance.
- It has recommended that countries prioritise national action plans to scale-up financing and capacity-building efforts.
- Countries must put in place stronger regulatory systems and support awareness programs for responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials by professionals in human, animal and plant health and invest in ambitious research and development for new technologies to combat antimicrobial resistance.

6. EAT-Lancet Commission report

- EAT is a non-profit startup dedicated to transforming our global food system
- Lancet is a medical Journal

EAT-Lancet Commission

- Food systems have the potential to nurture human health and support environmental sustainability, however our current use of resources world over threaten both.
- The EAT-Lancet Commission addresses the need to feed a growing global population a healthy diet while also defining sustainable food systems that will minimise damage to our planet

- The Commission wants people to consume universal healthy reference diet, based on an increase in consumption of healthy foods (such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, and nuts), and a decrease in consumption of unhealthy foods (such as red meat, sugar, and refined grains) that would provide major health benefits, and also increase the likelihood of attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Context

- The report has been authored by 37 international experts, including two from India
- The report is multi-disciplinary, as well as multicultural, with representatives from 16 countries contributing to the findings.

What does the report say?

- The way we are producing food today is causing increased emission of greenhouse gases, depleting fresh water supply, compromising land use, exhausting the nitrogen and phosphorous cycle, and endangering biodiversity.
 - * It has caused greater damage to the mother Earth and her system, so we as humans who are major cause to this, will have to work about ways to bring an end to it.
- A plant-based diet, with less meat and more vegetables, could help save both human health and the environment

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)

- It was launched at the UN in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition.
- It is an independent non-profit foundation based in Geneva, Switzerland.
- GAIN is an organization driven by the vision of a world without malnutrition.
- Working with partners developing public-private partnerships, GAIN aims at making healthier food choices more affordable, more available, and more desirable.

7. Echidna- Antibiotic-Resistant Bacterial Strains

- Echidnas, also known as spiny anteaters, are unique egg-laying mammals found only in Australia and New Guinea.
- Their young hatch from eggs at a very early stage of development and depend completely on mother's milk.
- But the mammary glands of the echidnas are devoid of nipples, forcing the young ones to lick milk from the mother's body surface and potentially making them vulnerable to micro-organisms.
- Nature protects its own. The milk of the echidna has a protein that can puncture the cell membranes of multiple bacterial species, thus destroying the source of infection.

Context

- Scientists at the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research - Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CSIR-CCMB) here have isolated an anti-microbial protein found in the milk of an egg-laying mammal Echidna.
- The protein promises to serve as an alternative to antibiotics used on livestock.

Details

- The research team said that there are ways to produce the protein in large quantities using *E. coli*. It can then be used to fight infections.
- The scientist pointed out that there is a rise of superbugs due to the indiscriminate use of antibiotics by the animal husbandry industry to raise livestock.
- The superbugs can cause Mastitis, an infection of the mammary gland, in dairy animals.
- Researchers have been able to show that the protein from echidna milk is effective against mastitis-causing bacteria.

8. For a malnutrition-free India (Government Interventions)

A Look at some of the Government Schemes:

Government has taken various measures to check malnutrition in the people living Below Poverty Line (BPL) and the tribals which are as follows:

- Promotion of appropriate infant and young child feeding practices that include early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding till 6 months of age through ASHA worker and health care provider at health facilities. Under "MAA" programme of MoHFW, impetus on capacity building of the health workers on lactation management at both community and facility levels and 360 degree IEC campaign to create awareness regarding breastfeeding is being carried out.
- Treatment of sick children with severe acute malnutrition at special units called the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres (NRCs), set up at public health facilities.
- Vitamin A supplementation for children aged 6 months to 5 years and iron and folic acid supplementation is being carried out for children, adolescents, pregnant and lactating women through life cycle approach under "National Iron Plus Initiative" programme. Also, promotion of intake of iodised salt is being carried out under National Iodine Deficiency Disorders Control Programme.

- Village Health and Nutrition Days and Mother and Child Protection Card are the joint initiative of the Ministries of Health & Family welfare and the Ministry of Woman and Child for addressing the nutrition concerns in children, pregnant women and lactating mothers. Monthly Village Health and Nutrition Days (VHND) are monthly days held at village level in Anganwadi centre to increase the awareness and bring about desired changes in the dietary practices including the promotion of breastfeeding.
- Under the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) and Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK), systematic efforts are undertaken to detect nutrition deficiency among children and adolescents respectively.
- Supplementary Nutrition in form of hot-cooked meals and take-home ration provided to children aged 6 months to 6 years under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme, Growth monitoring of children aged 0-5 years on a monthly basis at Anganwadi Centres.
- Mid-day meal is provided for all students enrolled in Government and Government aided schools.

It is important to note that the Government is implementing several schemes and programs like:

- * Anganwadi Services,
- * Scheme for Adolescent Girls and
- * Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojna under the Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services Scheme as direct targeted interventions to address the problem of malnutrition in the country.
- All these schemes address one or other aspects related to nutrition and have the potential to improve nutritional outcomes in the country.
- Malnutrition is not a direct cause of death but contributes to mortality and morbidity by reducing resistance to infections.
- There are a number of causes of death of children such as prematurity, low birth weight, pneumonia, diarrhoeal diseases, non-communicable diseases, birth asphyxia & birth trauma, injuries, congenital anomalies, acute bacterial sepsis and severe infections, etc.

Perspective on National Nutrition Mission (NNM):

- Apart from the existing schemes aimed at reduction in the levels of malnutrition among women and child, recently, the Government has set up the National Nutrition Mission (NNM) for improving the nutritional indicators of children and pregnant women and lactating mothers.

What does the National Nutrition Mission (NNM) aim to do?

- The Mission aims to prevent and reduce prevalence of stunting among children (0-6 years) in the country by 6%, under-nutrition (underweight) prevalence among children (0-6 years) by 6%, prevalence of anaemia among children (6-59 m) by 9%, prevalence of anaemia among women (15-49 years) by 9% and reduction in prevalence of low birth weight by 6%.
- The Goals set under the mission will be achieved by ensuring convergence with various programmes; incentivizing States/ UTs; IT enabled Real Time Monitoring (ICT-RTM) by using Smart Phones and Tablets; Evaluation; Community mobilisation awareness advocacy; IEC, Online Course on Nutrition for Children, Nutrition message from folk songs and songs on WASH, and strengthening human resource, etc.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that in this election season, it is important to keep promises made not just to voters, but also those made to improve the lives of children, the future of the nation.
- Despite programme commitments since 1975, such as creating Integrated Child Development Services and national coverage of the mid-day meal scheme, India continues to grapple with a high rate of under-nutrition.

Stunting: A Major Challenge Area

- Improving nutrition and managing stunting continue to be big challenges, and they can be addressed only with an inter-sectoral strategy.
- Stunting has lifelong consequences on human capital, poverty and equity.
- It leads to less potential in education and fewer professional opportunities.
- According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4, India has unacceptably high levels of stunting, despite marginal improvement over the years.
- In 2015-16, 38.4% of children below five years were stunted and 35.8% were underweight. India ranks 158 out of 195 countries on the human capital index.
- It is important to note that a lack of investment in health and education leads to slower economic growth.
- The World Bank says, "A 1% loss in adult height due to childhood stunting is associated with a 1.4% loss in economic productivity".
- Stunting also has lasting effects on future generations.
- Since 53.1% of women were anaemic in 2015-16, this will have lasting effects on their future pregnancies and children. The situation further worsens when infants are fed inadequate diets.

Some of the Ambitious goals that have been set:

- The aim of the National Nutrition Strategy of 2017 is to achieve a malnutrition-free India by 2022.
- The plan is to reduce stunting prevalence in children (0-3 years) by about three percentage points per year by 2022 from NFHS-4 levels, and achieve a one-third reduction in anaemia in children, adolescents and women of reproductive age.
- This is an ambitious goal, especially given that the decadal decline in stunting from 48% in 2006 to 38.4% in 2016 is only one percentage point a year.
- This promise calls for serious alignment among line ministries, convergence of nutrition programmes, and stringent monitoring of the progress made in achieving these goals.
- The data available on stunting tell us where to concentrate future programmes.
- Stunting prevalence tends to increase with age and peaks at 18-23 months.
- Timely nutritional interventions of breastfeeding, age-appropriate complementary feeding, full immunisation, and Vitamin A supplementation have been proven effective in improving outcomes in children.
- However, data show that only 41.6% children are breastfed within one hour of birth, 54.9% are exclusively breastfed for six months, 42.7% are provided timely complementary foods, and only 9.6% children below two years receive an adequate diet. India must improve in these areas.
- Vitamin A deficiency can increase infections like measles and diarrhoeal diseases.
- About 40% of children don't get full immunisation and Vitamin A supplementation. They must be provided these for disease prevention.

Variations across States and districts

- According to NFHS-4 data, India has more stunted children in rural areas as compared to urban areas, possibly due to the low socio-economic status of households in those areas.
- Almost double the prevalence of stunting is found in children born to mothers with no schooling as compared to mothers with 12 or more years of schooling.
- Stunting shows a steady decline with increase in household income.
- The inter-generational cycle of malnutrition is to be tackled with effective interventions for both mother (pre- and post-pregnancy) and child, to address the high burden of stunting.

- In terms of geographical regions, Bihar (48%), Uttar Pradesh (46%) and Jharkhand (45%) have very high rates of stunting, while States with the lowest rates include Kerala, and Goa (20%).
- While nutrition has improved across all States, inter-State variabilities remain extremely high. The most significant decline has been noted in Chhattisgarh (a 15 percentage point drop in the last decade). Thus, the government can take lessons from Chhattisgarh. The least progress has been made in Tamil Nadu.
- A study by the International Food Policy Research Institute shows that stunting prevalence varies across districts (12.4-65.1%), and almost 40% districts have stunting levels above 40%. U.P. tops the list, with six out of 10 districts having the highest rates of stunting.

Concluding Remarks:

- Looking at this data, it is imperative to push for convergence of health and nutrition programmes right from pregnancy until the child reaches five years of age.
- India must adopt a multi-pronged approach in bringing about socio-behavioral change.
- What is really needed is effective monitoring and implementation of programmes to address malnutrition.

9. H5N1 Virus

- H5N1 is a type of influenza virus that causes a highly infectious, severe respiratory disease in birds called avian influenza (or "bird flu").
- Human cases of H5N1 avian influenza occur occasionally, but it is difficult to transmit the infection from person to person. When people do become infected, the mortality rate is about 60%.
- H5N1 infection in humans can cause severe disease and has a high mortality rate.
- Almost all cases of H5N1 infection in people have been associated with close contact with infected live or dead birds, or H5N1-contaminated environments.
- The virus does not infect humans easily, and spread from person to person appears to be unusual. There is no evidence that the disease can be spread to people through properly prepared and thoroughly cooked food.

Symptoms of H5N1 avian influenza in humans:

- The symptoms of H5N1 infection may include fever and malaise, cough, sore throat, and muscle aches.
- Other early symptoms may include abdominal pain, chest pain and diarrhoea.
- The infection may progress quickly to severe respiratory illness (for example, difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pneumonia, Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome) and neurologic changes (altered mental status or seizures).

Treatment:

- In most cases, avian influenza in humans develops into a serious disease that should be treated promptly in the hospital and may require intensive care, where available.
- The antiviral medicine oseltamivir can reduce the severity of illness and prevent death, and should be used in all cases.

10. Impetigo

- Impetigo is a highly contagious skin infection that can spread through physical contact, such as through infected skin.
- It is very common among children and can lead to plaques, blisters or red patches on the skin.
- It is also caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*.
- A less common form of the disorder, called bullous impetigo, may feature larger blisters that occur on the trunk of infants and young children.
- A more serious form of impetigo, called ecthyma, penetrates deeper into the skin — causing painful fluid- or pus-filled sores that turn into deep ulcers.
- Adults and people with diabetes or a weakened immune system are more likely to develop ecthyma.
- Impetigo infections are more common in summer.
- The bacteria that cause impetigo often enter the skin through a small skin injury, insect bite or rash.

11. Integrate TB services with primary health system:

Lancet

Stats on Tuberculosis

- Of the 10 million new tuberculosis (TB) cases reported globally in 2017 by the World Health Organisation, 2.74 million were from India, showing a marginal reduction from 2.79 million in 2016.
- Despite TB incidence in the country being 204 cases per 1,00,000 in 2017, the government has set a highly ambitious target of "eliminating TB by 2025", five years ahead of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target.

Concerns

- India has set an ambitious goal of eliminating TB by 2025, but integration of TB services with the primary health system to reduce diagnostic delays is not happening.
 - * Patients are not diagnosed and treated at the primary level, which is the first point of contact. Only this will lead to early diagnosis and help cut the transmission cycle

The Lancet Global Health article

- But according to The Lancet Global Health article based on modelling for three high-burden countries, including India, compared with 2015 data, 57% reduction in incidence and 72% reduction in mortality will be seen only by 2035.
- Strengthening the care cascade could reduce cumulative TB incidence by 38% in the case of India, it notes.
- India has to adopt measures to prevent TB on a population level to eliminate the disease in the coming decades, it adds.
 - * The India report card says diagnosis and treatment for drug-sensitive and drug-resistant TB need improvement.
 - * Modelling suggests that lives of eight million (28%) people with TB can be saved over the next 30 years if tests are subsidised and patients are supported to complete the treatment.
 - * The Lancet Commission recommends that India should scale up access to TB services for all those seeking them, optimise engagement of private sector providers and guarantee universal access to drug susceptibility testing and second line TB drugs.

12. WHO says one in 10 children did not get vaccinated in 2016**Context**

- According to figures released by the World Health Organisation (WHO), despite immunisation being one of the most successful and cost-effective means to help children grow into healthy adults, worldwide 12.9 million infants — nearly 1 in 10 — did not receive any vaccination in 2016.
- Immunisation prevents illness, disability and death from vaccine-preventable diseases including cervical cancer, diphtheria, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), pneumonia, polio, rotavirus diarrhoea, rubella and tetanus.

Some facts as reported by WHO

- Global vaccination coverage remains at 85%, with no significant changes during the past few years
- An additional 1.5 million deaths could be avoided if global immunisation coverage improves.
- Over the years, the positive trend is about increasing uptake of new and underused vaccines. In fact, according to WHO in 2017, the number of children immunised – 116.2 million – was the highest-ever reported.

Issue Area

- Despite these gains, all of the targets for disease elimination — including measles, rubella, and maternal and neonatal tetanus — are behind schedule, and over the last two years, the world has seen multiple outbreaks of measles, diphtheria and various other vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Most of the children missing out are those living in the poorest, marginalised and conflict-affected communities
-

ART AND CULTURE

1. 'Bihu

- Bihu is a popular folk dance associated with the state of Assam in India and it is performed generally during the Bihu festival. There are primarily three Bihu festivals that are popular in Assam namely Rongali Bihu, Kongali Bihu and Bhogali Bihu and the Bihu dance is performed during the Rongali Bihu.
- Rongali Bihu is the merriest of all the Bihu festivals celebrated across the year in Assam as it marks the beginning of the spring season. This particular festival is celebrated in mid-April and both men and women take part in a rhythmic celebration called Bihu.
- The male performers of Bihu are dressed in dhotis and gamocha.
- The women are dressed in Chador and Mekhela; Mekhela happens to be an attire that is cylindrical in shape and is worn on the lower half of the body. Chador on the other hand is like a drape which is used for covering the upper portion of the body. The women don a blouse beneath the chador and the common fabrics used for making the attire are pat silk, cotton and muga silk.
- Music is a vital part of every folk dance and the same is the case with Bihu. There are many instruments that are utilized during a Bihu performance namely a dhol, pepa, Taal, toka, xutuli, gogona and baanhi.

2. Dhimsa

- It is a tribal dance form, is performed by the Porja caste women
- A group of 15–20 women form a circle and dance praising the deity for the welfare of their domestic life.
- They also dance at the weddings since the women pray for peaceful and happy married life.
- The dance is originated in Koraput district in Odisha but has almost become an official dance of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh

3. Gohain Uliuwa Mela

- It is festival in Mayong village in Morigaon district of Assam
- The festival is organized with ancient traditional customs of Mayong village for its spiritual and mistrial powers.
- Mayong is considered as the Indian capital of black magic and witchcraft

Karbis

- Mikir in the Constitution Order of the Government of India
- They are one of the major ethnic tribe in [Not Indigenous] Northeast India and especially in the hill areas of Assam.
- The Karbis are the tribal community in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, a district administered as per the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India

4. Hawa Mahal ("Palace of Winds" or "Palace of the Breeze")

- It is Situated at Badi Choupad, Pink City of Jaipur
- It was built in 1799 by the King of Jaipur Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh (grandson of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh) and was designed by the architect Lal Chand Usta as an extension to the Royal City Palace.

For the Rajput women

- The Purdah system at the time was strictly followed.
- Rajput royal ladies should not be seen by strangers or appear in any public area.
- The construction of Hawa Mahal allows the royal ladies to enjoy every day street scenes to royal processions on the street without being seen.

Architecture

- The five-store palace was built in the form of Krishna's crown because Sarai Pratap Singh was devoted to Krishna, the Hindu god.
- Its unique five-story exterior is akin to the honeycomb of a beehive with its 953 small windows called jharokhas decorated with intricate latticework
- This architectural feature also allowed cool air from the Venturi effect to pass through, thus making the whole area more pleasant during the high temperatures in summer.

5. International Day for Monuments and Sites

- It is also known as World Heritage Day
- It is an international observance held on 18 April each year around the world with different types of activities, including visits to monuments and heritage sites, conferences, round tables and newspaper articles.
- The International Day for Monuments and Sites was proposed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and approved by the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1983.

- The aim is to promote awareness about the diversity of cultural heritage of humanity, their vulnerability and the efforts required for their protection and conservation
- In 2019, the theme is Rural Landscapes

6. Khelchawa Festival

- Tiwa tribals celebrates Khelchawa festival in Assam
- The festival is held at the close of the harvest season

7. National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA)

- It is a multi-venue, multi-purpose cultural centre in Mumbai
- Inaugurated in 1969, it was the first multi-venue, multi-genre cultural centre in South Asia.
- The NCPA is committed to preserving and promoting India's rich and vibrant artistic heritage in the fields of music, dance, theatre, film, literature and photography, as well as presenting new and innovative work by Indian and international artists from a diverse range of genres including drama, contemporary dance, orchestral concerts, opera, jazz and chamber music.
- The NCPA was the brainchild of JRD Tata and Dr. Jamshed Bhabha, two visionaries who saw India's need for an all-encompassing world-class performing arts centre.

Context

- Speaking at the "CHIRAGH" concert of the South Asian Symphony Orchestra at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai, the Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that music has the power to overcome the tribulations of war and terrorism and sends the message of oneness.

8. National Monuments Authority (NMA)

- It comes under the Ministry of Culture
- It has been setup as per provisions of The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010
 - * There has been constant increase of urbanization, development, growth and increasing population pressure, which lays pressure on land for all these activities including the land around centrally protected monuments.
 - * Therefore this act mandated to consider the impact of large scale development projects, including public projects proposed in the regulated area; to make recommendations to the Competent Authority for grant of NOC for construction of residential/commercial building in the regulated area of Centrally Protected Monuments/Sites.
- It is assigned the task of protection and preservation of monuments and sites

- Its responsibility is to consider grant of permissions to applicants for construction related activity in the prohibited and regulated area.

Terms

- Prohibited Area
 - * The minimum area with respect to centrally protected monuments is 100m, in all directions beginning at the limit of the protected area of the centrally protected monument or site.
 - * Only the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) can carry out repairs in the 100 metre-span from a protected area
- Regulated area
 - * The area starting from 100 metres from such a monument till 300 metres away from it is the "regulated area", as per the Act.

Who is the Competent Authority (CAs)?

- As per the provisions of 'The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010', the NMA is the competent authority to issue the recommendation for carrying out any repair/renovation in any property located in the prohibited area (upto 100 mtr. In all directions from any centrally protected monument / site),
- whereas the Competent Authority declared by the Central Government in consultation with the respective State Government after issuing the notification, is empowered to issue NOC for carrying out any repair/renovation in any property located in the regulated area (from 100 mtr. to 300 mtr. in all directions from any centrally protected monument/site).
- However, the NMA is empowered to recommend the construction/reconstruction proposals received through the concerned Competent Authorities for the properties located in the regulated area (from 100 mtr. to 300 mtrs. in all directions from any centrally protected monument/site) and subsequently, the respective Competent Authority has to issue NOC.
- No permission of construction/reconstruction is allowed in the prohibited area of any centrally protected monument/site.

Context

- National Monuments Authority's Heritage by-laws have been drafted in accordance with the provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010, for Purana Qila and the Khair-ul-Manazil mosque which will be released shortly.

Drafting rules

- For the regulated areas, the NMA is drafting heritage by-laws for each monument or group of monuments that will determine the nature of new construction activity.

- The proposed by-laws will lay down restrictions on the height of new constructions, among other features.
- By-laws would be aimed at ensuring new constructions are "in harmony" with the protected monuments.

NOC Online Application and Processing System (NOAPS)

- The National Monuments Authority has developed this online Web Portal.
- This has been created in view with the directive of Prime Minister of India regarding "e-Governance" and "Ease of Doing Business"
- The Portal has used the technology and expertise of Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)
- The applicants need to fill up a single form which will be sent to the concerned agencies by the local body, from whom No Objection Certificate (NOC) is required.
- NMA on its part will communicate its decision to the local body within six working day, bringing down the time limit from ninety days, as prescribed in Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act.
- The applicant is not required to visit NMA in connection with his/her application but can track the progress of the application online.
- However, large projects involving construction of building beyond 2000 sq mt. have been kept out of the purview of Single Window Clearance System, keeping in view their possible impact on the Monument or the site.

GOVERNANCE

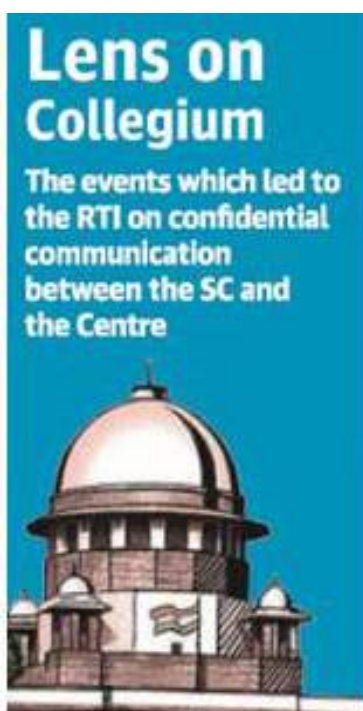
1. 'RTI scrutiny will ruin judicial independence'

Background

- A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court began hearing on its own appeal whether the Chief Justice of India's office is covered under the purview of the transparency law – Right to Information Act (RTI).
- The issue that arose from an appeal filed by the Supreme Court against the 2010 judgement of the Delhi High Court that declared the CJI's office a "public authority" within the meaning of Section 2(h) of the RTI Act, 2005

Current case

- A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi commenced hearing on three appeals filed in 2010 by Secretary General of the Supreme Court and the Central Public Information Officer of the apex court against the Delhi High Court order holding that the CJI's office comes under the ambit of the Right to Information Act.
- First case pertained to Central Information Commission's direction to reveal deliberations of collegium and its communications with the government on the issue of appointments
- Second case pertained to CIC's direction on disclosure of personal assets by apex court judges.
- Third one was related to direction to the CPIO of the apex court to disclose the information under RTI about alleged action of a Union minister who attempted to influence a Madras HC judge.



■ Activist Subhash Chandra Agarwal files an **RTI seeking the correspondence between the SC Collegium and the Centre** on the appointment of Justices H.L. Dattu, A.K. Ganguly and R.M. Lodha superseding Justices A.P. Shah, A.K. Patnaik and V.K. Gupta. Justices Dattu and Lodha later became Chief Justices

■ **SC refuses.** The case comes

Central Information Commission (CIC), which **rules in favour of Agarwal in 2009** and dismisses SC's argument that judiciary should be free from "intrusions by strangers..."

■ SC appeals in the Delhi HC against the CIC verdict. The HC dismisses the appeal

■ In January 2010, a three-judge HC Bench of Justice A.P. Shah (now retired) **upholds HC decision**

■ In November 2010,

An SC Bench led by Justice B. Sudarshi Reddy (now retired) refers the appeal to three-judge Bench

■ In August 2016, three-judge Bench refers the appeal to **Constitution Bench**

■ If the Constitution Bench upholds the CIC order of 2009, the ordinary citizen would be empowered to seek confidential details of all judicial appointments and transfers, thus opening a "judicial

What did attorney General Say?

- Venugopal opposed disclosure of information under RTI on collegium's deliberations
- If the RTI to be applied to the collegium, its member judges would not be able to sit back and have a free and frank discussion for fear that their confidential views may later come into the public domain.
- Disclosure of such highly confidential information will be deleterious to the functioning of the judiciary
- Disclosure of deliberations of collegium in appointing or overlooking senior judges would open "pandora's box" and this would adversely affect the independence of judiciary
- There is a possibility of people making frivolous complaints once a judge is sought to be elevated or a lawyer is considered for the appointment as a judge
- He said the right to know is part of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 and this right has to be subject to reasonable restrictions.

Should they be under RTI? Yes

- Justice Bhat correctly observed in the Delhi High Court judgment, "all power — judicial power being no exception — is held accountable in a modern Constitution".
- A blanket judicial exemption from the RTI Act would defeat the basic idea of "open justice": that the workings of the courts, as powerful organs of state, have to be as transparent and open to public scrutiny as any other body.
- Bringing judiciary under the RTI Act would not destroy the personal privacy of judges as the High Court judgment noted, the RTI Act itself has an inbuilt privacy-oriented protection, which authorises withholding the disclosure of personal information unless there is an overriding public interest.
- While disclosure of assets is arguably justified by an overriding public interest, medical details or information about marital status, for example, are clearly not

Conclusion

- The Collegium's recent decisions to recommend a set of names for elevation, and then hastily backtrack on them without any publicly stated reasons, dealt a serious blow to its reputation for impartiality and independence.
- The only way to salvage this is to open up the court. A judiciary that is confident of itself and of its place in the democratic republic should not be worried about subjecting judicial appointments to public scrutiny.

2. SC Orders RBI to Disclose Annual Inspection Reports of Banks under RTI**Context**

- The Supreme Court directed the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to disclose information about its Annual Inspection Report of banks and the list of wilful defaulters under the Right to Information Act (RTI).
- Earlier, the apex court and the Central Information Commission (CIC), both had held that the RBI cannot deny information to an information seeker under the transparency law unless the material is exempted from disclosure under the law.

Annual Inspection Report of banks

- RBI is empowered under section 35 of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 to conduct annual inspection of all commercial banks—public, private and foreign.
- It conducts an on-site inspection of all banks once a year.
- RBI officials visit the head offices and branches of banks to inspect the books
- Currently, the annual inspection is based on a Risk-Based Supervision method which focuses on "evaluating both present and future risks, identifying incipient problems and facilitates prompt intervention/early corrective action".
- It covers financial position, functioning of board and various links of the bank, details of assets and liabilities, treasury management, asset liability management, liquidity operations, para banking activities, etc.
 - * Earlier RBI used to follow the CAMELS approach—capital adequacy, asset quality, management, earning, liquidity and system and control.
- The content of the annual inspection report is discussed with the head of the particular bank before finalization. The final report is then shared with the banks to enable them to take corrective steps.

Details

- The Court, which did not initiate contempt proceedings against the RBI, warned that any future violation of the transparency law would be "viewed seriously".
- SC bench also directed the federal bank to review its policy to disclose information relating to banks under RTI

Background

- Few petitioners were denied copies of inspection reports of ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank and State Bank of India from April 2011 till December 2015.
- They had sought the inspection reports under the RTI in December 2015.

- The RBI had stated that it was exempt from disclosing information under Section 8(1)(e) of the RTI Act and Section 45NB of the Reserve Bank of India Act.
 - * To which SC had said in its judgment in 2016 that the RBI is not in any fiduciary relationship with any bank.

Central Information Commission (CIC)

- In 2011 the CIC said the public has the right to know how banks are functioning since significant amounts of public funds are kept in banks.
- Former CIC Shailesh Gandhi had directed the RBI to disclose the names of banks that had been penalized or served show-cause notices.
- However, the central bank defended its stance on the grounds of protecting fiduciary and commercial interests.

What is the impact of the Supreme Court order?

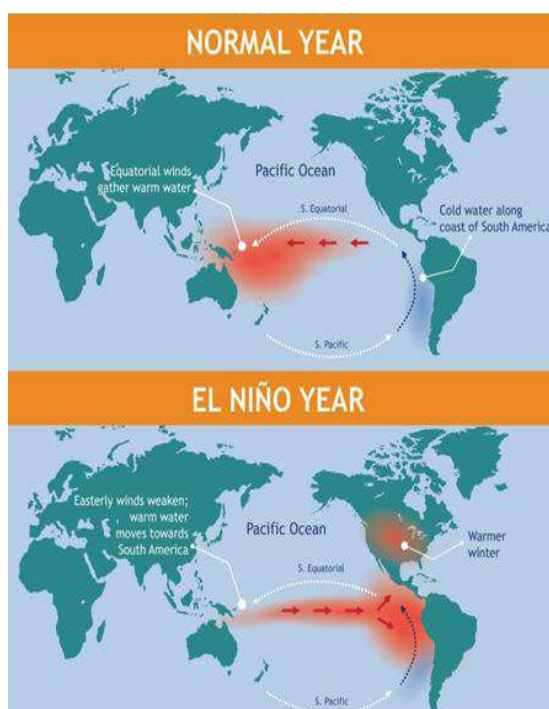
- The RBI will be required to provide annual inspection reports and other material (such as details of penalties) unless it is exempted under law.
- While this will provide greater transparency about the affairs of banks, it has the potential to affect the regulatory process of the RBI.
- Information contained in RBI annual inspection reports relating to banks is highly sensitive. The central bank through these efforts tries to ensure that the banking system remains smooth with minimum disruptions. Greater bank disclosures help investors and depositors, but it can also have unintended consequences.

GEOGRAPHY

1. El Nino

Meaning

- El Niño means The Little Boy, or Christ Child in Spanish. El Niño was originally recognized by fishermen off the coast of South America in the 1600s, with the appearance of unusually warm water in the Pacific Ocean. The name was chosen based on the time of year (around December) during which these warm waters events tended to occur.



Background

- El Niño and La Niña are opposite phases of what is known as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle.
- ENSO shifts irregularly back and forth between El Niño and La Niña every two to seven years.
- The ENSO cycle is a scientific term that describes the fluctuations in temperature between the ocean and atmosphere in the east-central Equatorial Pacific
- La Niña is sometimes referred to as the cold phase of ENSO and El Niño as the warm phase of ENSO.

Normal Conditions

- Normally, the temperature of surface water in the western Pacific Ocean is 6-8 °C higher than in the eastern Pacific Ocean.
- This helps to generate heavy rains over southeastern Asia and northern Australia and keeps parts of Pacific coastal South America relatively dry

- But during El Niño, this reverses, changing the atmospheric pressure on either side of the ocean.

During El Niño

- The surface water in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean is unusually warm.
- Trade winds blowing from east to west weaken, and the warm surface waters that typically stay in the western Pacific are able to move east along the equator.
- Rainstorms follow the warm water to the central and eastern Pacific, dry conditions affect northern Australia and Southeast Asia, and wetter conditions impact Pacific coastal South America

Oceanic Niño Index (ONI)

- It is a measure of the departure from normal sea surface temperature in the east-central Pacific Ocean
- It is the standard means by which each El Niño episode is determined, gauged, and forecast.
- El Niño episodes are indicated by sea surface temperature increases of more than 0.5 °C (0.9 °F) for at least five successive overlapping three-month seasons.

Southern Oscillation Index (SOI)

- It gives an indication of the development and intensity of El Niño or La Niña.
- The SOI is calculated on the basis of the atmospheric pressure differences between Tahiti (South Pacific Ocean) and Darwin (Australia), separated by 8,569 km.
- Sustained positive SOI values are indicative of La Niña conditions while negative values suggest El Niño conditions.

This results in:

- the distortion of equatorial atmospheric circulation;
- irregularities in the evaporation of sea water;
- Reduction in the amount of planktons which further reduces the number of fish in the sea.

Impact

- Going by historical data of 135 years from 1880 to 2014, about 90% of all evolving El Niño years have led to below normal rainfall and 65% of evolving El Niño years have brought droughts. From this fact, one thing is clear that El Niño years adversely affect the weather in India in terms of Monsoon rain
- If El Niño retains strength and impacts monsoon rains in June and July, the first two months of the season, it could lead to delay in sowing of rain-fed kharif crops affecting overall crop production.

- Below normal rains could aggravate the agrarian crisis and impact the allied industrial sectors.
- El Nino has been found to impact almost half the world triggering droughts in Australia, India, southern Africa and
- Floods in Peru, Ecuador, the United States, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Colorado River basin.

2. La Niña

- La Niña means The Little Girl in Spanish. La Niña is also sometimes called El Viejo, anti-El Niño, or simply "a cold event."
- La Niña is characterized by the opposite process: the trade winds strengthen, and warm water and rainstorms are pushed to the far western equatorial Pacific over Indonesia
- This results in cooler surface water in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, dry conditions in Pacific coastal South America, and much wetter conditions in northern Australia and southeast Asia
- El Nino has been generally known to suppress monsoon rainfall in India while La Nina increases it

3. Monsoon likely to be 'normal' this year, says meteorological dept.

Context

- India Meteorological Department (IMD), the government's principal agency for weather forecasting and rainfall monitoring has forecast that the country would receive normal rainfall during the coming south-west monsoon season. IMD brands the monsoon as 'normal' or 'deficient' based on how it fares against its benchmark Long Period Average (LPA). This year it is expected to be 96% of LPA.

LPA

LPA is the average rainfall received by the country as a whole during the south-west monsoon, for a 50-year period

- The current LPA is 89 cm, based on the average rainfall over years 1951 and 2000.
- It is kept as a benchmark while forecasting the quantitative rainfall for the monsoon season every year.

MD maintains five rainfall distribution categories on an all-India scale. These are:

- Normal or Near Normal: When per cent departure of actual rainfall is +/-10% of LPA, that is, between 96-104% of LPA
- Below normal: When departure of actual rainfall is less than 10% of LPA, that is 90-96% of LPA
- Above normal: When actual rainfall is 104-110% of LPA

- Deficient: When departure of actual rainfall is less than 90% of LPA
- Excess: When departure of actual rainfall is more than 110% of LPA

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) also known as Indian Nino

- It is an irregular oscillation of sea-surface temperature, in which the Western Indian Ocean becomes alternately warmer and then colder than the eastern part of the ocean.
- It is defined by the difference in sea surface temperature between two areas (or poles, hence a dipole) – a western pole in the Arabian Sea (western Indian Ocean) and an eastern pole in the eastern Indian Ocean south of Indonesia.

Positive IOD

- During the Positive IOD, the eastern equatorial Indian Ocean off Sumatra in Indonesia becomes colder than normal while the western tropical part of the Indian Ocean near the African coast becomes unusually warm.
- Such an event has been found to be beneficial for the monsoon.

Negative IOD

- In this case the opposite of the above mentioned case occurs. The eastern equatorial Indian Ocean off Sumatra in Indonesia becomes abnormally warm while the western tropical part of the ocean near the African coast becomes relatively colder.
- This effect obstructs the progression of monsoon over India.

HISTORY

1. Jallianwala Bagh massacre

What's in the news?

- Recently, British Prime Minister Theresa May, on the occasion of the centenary of the horrific Jallianwala Bagh massacre, said: "We deeply regret what happened and the suffering caused."

Larger Background:

A Brief Look at the Past:

- On April 13, 1919, Baisakhi day, following unrest in Amritsar after protests against the Rowlatt Act, Brigadier General (temporary rank) Reginald Dyer took a strike force of 50 rifles and 40 khukri-wielding Gurkhas into an enclosed ground, Jallianwala Bagh, where a peaceful public meeting of 15,000-20,000 was being held.
- Immediately and without warning, he ordered fire to be opened on the crowd.
- The firing of 1,650 rounds was deliberate and targeted, using powerful rifles at virtually point-blank range. The "suffering caused" included several hundred dead and many times more wounded. The officially accepted figure of 379 dead is a gross underestimate.
- Eyewitness accounts and information collected by Sewa Samiti, a charity organisation point to much higher numbers. Non-Indian writers place the number killed at anything between 500 to 600, with three times that number wounded.
- More was to follow after the proclamation, two days after the massacre, of Martial Law in Punjab: the infamous crawling order, the salaam order, public floggings, arbitrary arrests, torture and bombing of civilians by airplanes — all under a veil of strictly enforced censorship.

A history of evasion

- After calls for an investigation, including by liberals in Britain, a Disorders Inquiry Committee, soon to be known by the name of its Chairman, Lord Hunter, was set up.
- In his testimony, Dyer asserted that his intention had been to punish the crowd, to make a "wide impression" and to strike terror not only in Amritsar but throughout Punjab.
- The committee split along racial lines and submitted a majority and minority report.
- The majority report of the Hunter Committee, using tactically selective criticism, established Dyer's culpability but let off the Lieutenant Governor, Michael O'Dwyer.
- The minority report written by the three Indian members was more scathing in its criticism.

- By then Dyer had become a liability and he was asked to resign his command, after which he left for England.
- This decision for a quiet discharge was approved by the British Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, and, after an acrimonious debate, also by the House of Commons.
- The conservative Lords however took a different tack and rebuked the government for being unjust to the officer.
- Similar sentiments in Dyer's favour came from the right-wing press — the Morning Post started a fund for him which collected £26,000 — as well as from conservative sections of the public who believed he had saved India for the empire.
- Rudyard Kipling, who had contributed £10 to the fund put an ambivalent comment on the wreath he sent to Dyer's funeral in 1927: "He did his duty as he saw it."

Reflections on a massacre:

- For Indians, the massacre that evokes strong emotions is not Nader Shah's slaughter of 30,000 people in Delhi in 1739 but Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, where, a century ago, on April 13, 1919 troops commanded by General Dyer fired into an unarmed crowd, killing hundreds.
- The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, like later ones in Lidice (1942) and My Lai (1968), was relatively small. It was nothing compared to the hundreds of thousands killed by the Japanese army in Nanjing in 1937-38 or by Indonesian soldiers in East Timor 1975 onward.
- Jallianwala Bagh's importance lies not in the numbers killed but in what preceded it and in what followed. The Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, better known as the Rowlatt Act, came into force a month before the massacre in Jallianwala Bagh.
- It shocked most Indians who had expected to be rewarded, not punished, for willingly fighting alongside the British in the First World War.
- The massacre, followed by the feting and rewarding of its perpetrator, General Dyer, by the British public, removed all illusions about benign British rule in the country.
- It also marked the start of a liberation struggle like no other under Mahatma Gandhi.
- It took Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore to capture the full import of the outrage at Jallianwala Bagh.

- In his letter of protest renouncing the knighthood conferred on him, he wrote: "The accounts of the insults and sufferings by our brothers in Punjab have trickled through the gagged silence, reaching every corner of India, and the universal agony of indignation roused in the hearts of our people has been ignored by our rulers — possibly congratulating themselves for what they imagine as salutary lessons."
- Many massacres in history fade while some linger as grisly curiosities. The killing of every male inhabitant of the Persian town of Kernan in 1794 by Agha Mohammed Khan is better known for the latter's insistence that the eyeballs be brought to him in baskets and poured on the floor.
- Most massacres that endure in public memory are those for which countries are responsible. Like Jallianwala Bagh, they are never forgotten or forgiven but unfailingly recollected through generations with deep loathing for their perpetrators.
- No Pole can talk about the 1940 Katyn massacre of over 20,000 Polish soldiers and civilians by the Russians, with equanimity. Another, and more recent, the 1995 massacre of some 8,000 Bosnians by break-away Serbians, is commemorated by a vast sombre memorial that doubles up as a cemetery comprising over 6,000 graves in Srebrenica.

Churchill's Comments:

- The speech that carried the day in the House of Commons in 1920 was that of Winston Churchill, no fan of Gandhi and his satyagraha.
- He called Dyer's deed "an extraordinary event, a monstrous event, an event which stands in sinister isolation"; privately he wrote that the "offence amounted to murder, or alternatively manslaughter".
- Significantly, Churchill, likening the event to "Prussian" tactics of terrorism, said that this was "not the British way of doing things". In other words, he was resorting to British exceptionalism: he was hanging out Dyer to dry as a rogue officer, while saving the larger colonial enterprise as benign.
- Dyer was certainly rogue, but he was not alone. He was one of a line of several such — John Nicholson, Frederick Cooper, J.L. Cowan — who resorted to severe disproportionate violence in 1857 and after the 1872 Kuka rebellion; he was also part of the despotic administration led by O'Dwyer (later assassinated by Udham Singh in 1940) which emboldened and then exonerated him.
- In 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron quoted the same Churchill epithet of "monstrous", adding that this was a "deeply shameful event in British history" and "we must never forget what happened here."
- The Queen had earlier termed it as a "distressing example" of past history. Again, general homilies with hands nicely off and no admission of a larger culpability of racialised colonial violence that underpinned imperialism.

Editorial Analysis:

The criticism PM Theresa May has come under for lack of an apology:

- There was some expectation of a British apology on the occasion of the centenary of the horrific Jallianwala Bagh massacre, more so since the demand came this time not from Indians alone but also from a strong contingent of British MPs across political parties.
- Words are important, especially in the heavily-nuanced English language.
- In comparison, in a press conference in Brussels, Ms. May said that she "sincerely regretted" her failure in delivering a Brexit deal so far. "Deeply" is admittedly stronger than "sincerely", but the nature of contrition expressed is identical.
- The second aspect of the statement that stands out is its passiveness — "what happened", "the suffering caused". There is no hint of agency here; this could well be the statement of any observer and not of inheritors of the empire that committed the atrocity.
- The blandness too is disturbing: one would have expected some sympathy for the victims or their descendants and some reference to the brutality of the massacre.

Concluding Remarks:

- Deep regret is all we may get instead of the unequivocal apology that is mandated.
- The expectation could be that time will add more distance to the massacre, making these calls for apology increasingly an academic exercise.
- We will no doubt also be advised to forgive and move on.
- The fact remains that there are many ways to heal a festering wound between nations, as Canada's apology for the Komagata Maru shows; clever drafting is not one of them.

2. Platinum Jubilee Commemoration of Battle of Kangla Tongbi

Context:

- The Platinum Jubilee of the Battle of Kangla Tongbi War was commemorated on 07 Apr 2019 by Army Ordnance Corps at Kangla Tongbi War Memorial near Imphal honouring the valiant brave hearts of Ordnance Personnel of 221 Advance Ordnance Depot who made their supreme sacrifice in the line of duty during the battle of World War-II on the night of 6/7 April 1944.

Details:

- The Battle of Kangla Tongbi, considered one of the fiercest battles of World War II, was fought by Ordnance personnel of 221 Advance Ordnance Depot (AOD) on the night of 6/7 April 1944.

- Japanese forces had planned a three-pronged offensive to capture Imphal and the surrounding areas. In their attempt to extend their line of communication to Imphal, the 33rd Japanese Division cut in behind the 17th Indian Division at Tiddim (Myanmar) and establishing themselves firmly on the main Kohima – Manipur highway, started advancing towards Kangla Tongbi.
- Here at Kangla Tongbi, a small but determined detachment of 221 AOD put up stiff resistance against the advancing Japanese forces.
- The position of 221 AOD was not at all sound from a tactical point of view. It was exposed to the enemy from all sides and had to rely on its own combatant manpower for its defence. Major Boyd, the Deputy Chief of Ordnance Officer (DCOO) was made in charge of the operations for the defence of the Depot. A Suicide squad comprising of Major Boyd, Havildar/ Clerk Store Basant Singh, Conductor Panken and other personnel from the Depot was created.
- On the night of 6/7 Apr 1944, the Japanese mounted a heavy attack on the Depot, rushing downhill into a deep nallah which was used as a covered approach to the Depot. A very well camouflaged bunker had been cited by the Depot on this approach. The Bren Gun Section in this bunker having spotted an enemy section within range opened fire. This shook the enemy and forced the Japanese to withdraw leaving many dead. The Bren Gun was manned by none other than Hav/ Clerk Store Basant Singh.

The Kangla Tongbi War Memorial:

- The Kangla Tongbi War Memorial is mute testimony to this battle and the unflinching devotion to duty of the Ordnance personnel of 221 AOD, 19 of who made the supreme sacrifice.
- It conveys to the world at large that Ordnance personnel, apart from being professional logisticians,

EDUCATION

1. Competing for the best

- The flow of academics, for decades, has been from India to other countries.
- One can find top Indian talent, for example, at many American universities.
- They include the dean of the Harvard Business School and the dean of Harvard College, and a number of university presidents as well as professors in many fields.
- This flow of talent has heavily impacted the availability of highly qualified academics in Indian universities.

Steps Taken to Counter the Brain Drain:

- * Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN),
- * Visiting Advanced Joint Research Faculty Scheme (VAJRA), and
- * Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC).
- It was reported recently that there are just 40 foreign teachers at all of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) — 1% of the total faculty of 5,400 — despite the government's goal to attract 20% international faculty at higher education institutions such as the IITs.
- This is despite the fact that internationalization in general and the appointment of global staff is central to the new 'Institutions of Eminence' programme.
- The goal is even loftier after the IIT Council, in 2018, recommended the recruitment of foreign faculty on a tenure basis.
- The Graded Autonomy Regulations of the University Grants Commission also now allows the highest performing universities to hire up to 20% foreign faculty on tenure basis.
- It is virtually impossible for India to attract large numbers of international professors of high standing and ability without dramatic changes in many aspects of the existing governance structure in higher education. Dramatically enhanced funding would also be required.

A Look at the talent pool:

- There are two kinds of international academics to be considered.
- The first category is accomplished senior professors — these would be very difficult to lure to India. Established in their careers, with attractive international salaries, and often with family and other obligations, they are embedded both in their universities and locales.

- The other group are younger scholars who may have fewer ties to universities and societies, and are thus more mobile.
- Further, some, depending on their disciplines, may have difficulty in locating a permanent academic job at home due to a tight academic job market.
- They also will not add to the immediate prestige of the Indian university which hires them since they do not have an established reputation. However, they can provide quality teaching, research and they often bring a useful international perspective.
- The main possibilities for mobility are academics of Indian origin (non-resident Indians) who have successful careers abroad and who might be attracted back. The major recent initiative of the Indian government, GIAN, has been successful in attracting many academics of Indian origin from different countries for shorter durations.
- However, the experiences of two prominent universities sponsored by Indian and other regional governments — the South Asian University in Delhi and Nalanda in Bihar — show that offering higher salaries with exemption from taxation has not been very successful in attracting senior faculty of foreign origin.
- In some ways, the best Indian universities would require a kind of "cultural revolution" to join the ranks of global world-class universities — and to be able to lure top faculty.
- The structural and practical realities of Indian universities make them generally unattractive to academic talent from abroad. A few examples indicate some of the challenges.

Scales of salary

- Indian academic salaries are not globally competitive, even taking into account variations in living costs. In the U.S., senior academics at research universities typically earn around ₹8,970,000 and up annually, and those at top universities can earn ₹13,800,000 or more.
- The average salary for a full-time academic is ₹5,037,000, with those in high demand fields in the sciences, business and others earning significantly more. In comparison, the total emoluments offered to a professor in an IIT located in one of the Indian metro cities, in accordance with the latest Pay Commission's minimum pay scale with house rent allowance is around ₹2,640,000.
- China, which is also actively luring top international faculty to its research universities, is offering salaries of ₹6,900,000 or more along with additional research funding.

- International faculty cannot be offered long-term appointments in Indian public institutions. A five-year contract is all that is available. Thus, there is little job security.
- Obtaining research funding is difficult and the resources available, by international standards, are quite limited.
- On the other hand, a few 'elite' private universities such as O.P. Jindal, Azim Premji, Ashoka, Shiv Nadar, Ahmedabad, Krea, and the management institute Indian School of Business have adopted different strategies; for instance, ranging from attracting foreign nationals, to Indians who studied at prestigious foreign universities to their institutions by offering higher salaries and other benefits than are available to local hires.
- The faculty diversity of O.P. Jindal Global University, for example, stands out among these with 71 full-time foreign faculty from 32 countries. The key motivation for hiring foreign faculty at all these institutions is to improve international competitiveness and secure positions in global rankings, which in turn would also attract more motivated students.

Concluding Remarks:

- These new private institutions with, by Indian standards, considerable resources have proved that it is possible to attract foreign faculty, at least those with an Indian ethnic background.
- But the challenges faced by public institutions, even those of as high quality as the IITs and the best universities, seem insurmountable, at least in the context of the current Indian higher education environment and bureaucratic and legal framework.

2. Dilution of the Right to Education Act

Background

- Right to Education is a fundamental right providing elementary education covering eight years (six to 14 years) of childhood. But this Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 is a long way off from becoming a social reality due to the reluctance to enforce many of its provisions. What has suffered the most is the autonomy and dignity of teachers, which form the core of this law's approach.

Children rights not implemented

- The case of children is worse. The children here do not have rights and cannot complain about lack of implementation of their rights to the adults or to the society or even the govt that their right is being violated. If this right is not exercised at the time that is required, compensation in the future will be of no use. Therefore there is an urgency to bring about changes. Making laws and asking courts to enforce it is one side of view but examining if this is actually being delivered to children is another.

Other laws which violate Child rights

- Labour and marriage laws also refer to childhood, purportedly protecting it from exploitation and early matrimony. These other laws, though a lot older than the RTE Act, are still struggling, unable to offer the protection that millions of children need in order to benefit from the RTE Act.

1. On the Labour Side

- As far as the legal provision against child labour is concerned, the difficulty of implementing the law has been compounded of late.
- The areas of legally permissible employment of children were formally expanded through an amendment passed in 2016 to cover family-owned businesses.
- Acknowledging potential conflict with the RTE Act, the amended child labour law specifies that children below 14 years can work in a family business only after school hours. Taking away their rights post school by making them work in family business and its impact on childhood is still not understood

2. On the marriage front

- RTE Act's protection to children, especially girls, remains weak.
- Efforts to keep girls enrolled at school are all that the state, with the help of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), is offering in many regions where child marriage is widely prevalent.
- Recent years have not brought much relief to India's struggling children, despite the existence—since 2005—of a specialised body called the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

Issues with no detention law and its changes

- This occurred in its promise of providing detention-free progress from ages six to 14 years. Parliament has amended the RTE Act to impart freedom to state governments to detain children on the basis of an examination at the end of Classes 5 and 8.
- Children who fail in these exams will be given a second chance shortly after failing, but if they fail again, they will have to repeat a whole year.
- Those states that are moving ahead to avail this new procedure are the ones where the RTE Act had made the least progress in its first decade.
 - * This amendment is based on the idea that the policy of no-detention encourages both children and teachers to take it easy.
 - * The unstated part of this idea is that children of the poor do not pay attention to studies unless they feel that they might fail.

The RTE Act had challenged this view

- It had banned annual examinations throughout the elementary years, but also by placing inside the law a policy framework for pedagogic reforms.

- The amendment dents this framework and allows the state to meddle with the broader vision on which the framework is based.
- The twin pillars of this framework are,
 - * one, upgrading of primary-level teacher training and reorienting it towards child-centred pedagogy; and,
 - * Two, implanting a continuous and Comprehensive And Evaluation (CCE) system.
- On both fronts, the last five years show a loss of momentum and institutional coordination.
 - * In teacher training, the recommendations of the Justice J S Verma Commission (appointed by the Supreme Court) had shown the way to combat commercialisation and corruption.
 - * On the CCE front, national resource institutions (for example, NCTE, National Council of Educational Research and Training, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration and Central Board of Secondary Education) have made little progress towards building consensus and capacity among elementary education authorities in the states.

The progress on the RTE Act suffered from many other factors.

- The financial arrangements made to facilitate the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) were supposed to be replaced by sustainable institutionalised procedures. This meant state-specific adjustment in old procedures to which the directorates were accustomed.
 - * A committee chaired by the late Anil Bordia had recommended numerous steps to harmonise the project-mode procedures adopted under the SSA with older procedures.
 - * These recommendations did not have the good luck to receive attention while the larger corpus of planning itself was mutating into the new National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) approach.
- The adoption of the Fourteenth Finance Commission's recommendation for increased transfer of funds to the states has been used as an excuse to reduce the centre's responsibility to directly support the implementation of the RTE Act.
 - * In states where implementation was sluggish to begin with, the centre's withdrawal of interest has led to further dilution of the local effort.
- Also, the general decline of institutional capacity in teacher education and research has made the RTE Act's demands for improvement of quality more difficult to meet.
- In a parallel development the RTE Act's pedagogic approach, that had barely begun to find entry in the training curriculum, is being pushed out by routinised teaching that focuses on minimalist outcomes and testing. The RTE Act's emphasis on arts and crafts has also been systemically diluted.

- Yet another socially radical measure mooted under this law is to reserve one-fourth of the seats in private fee-charging schools for children of the poorer strata. This measure has triggered a lot of legal activity, indicating how reluctant private schools are to implement the reservation.
 - * The promise to reimburse the private schools at the per child rate reflected in government's expenditure in its own schools is also waiting to be redeemed in most cases

Conclusion

- With over a million vacancies in teaching positions, the majority being in the northern states, the RTE Act is far from becoming a social reality.
- The tendency to equate efficiency with procurement of pedagogic and surveillance technology has grown, clouding all other issues, including better distribution of powers to decide. What has suffered most is the teacher's autonomy and dignity, which form the core of the RTE Act's approach.

3. IIT-Madras tops Centre's higher education rankings

Context:

- President Ramnath Kovind announced the rankings of higher educational institutions carried out as per the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).

Details:

- The Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT-Madras) has topped the Centre's ranking of higher education institutions, followed by the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, and IIT-Delhi. Seven IITs appear in the top 10 list of the National Institution Ranking Framework (NIRF) for 2019, while Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi and Banares Hindu University, Varanasi, take the remaining places.
- The rankings, published annually since 2016, are based on multiple parameters, including teaching, learning and resources; research and professional practice; graduation outcomes; outreach and inclusivity; and the perception of the public, academics and employers.

Top 5 About 3,127 institutions applied for different categories of the NIRF this year. A list of the top 5 across categories

Categories/Rank	1	2	3	4	5
Overall	IIT-M	IISc., Bengaluru	IIT-D	IIT-B	IIT Kharagpur
University	IISc., Bengaluru	JNU	IIT-Madras	Hyderabad	Calcutta
Engineering	IIT-M	IIT-D	IIT-B	IIT-Kgp	IIT-K
Medical	AIIMS, Delhi	PGIMER, Chandigarh	CMC Vellore	SGPMS, Lucknow	Amrita Vidyapeeth
Management	IIM-B	IIM-A	IIM-C	IIM-L	IIM-Indore
Colleges	Miranda House, Delhi	Hindu College, Delhi	Presidency College, Chennai	St. Stephen's, Delhi	LSR, Delhi

Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF):

- Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) launched the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) in 2015. NIRF has laid down a methodology for ranking institutions across India.
- In addition to excellence in teaching, learning and the research culture, the framework also includes parameters such as inclusiveness and diversity.
- Ranking of institutions of Higher Education will be an annual exercise as decided by the MHRD.

Parameters covered:

- Teaching Learning and Resources – the core activities of any place of learning are considered. Emphasis is laid on measuring the number and quality of faculty, lab resources, library and other such facilities needed for the development of the students. These parameters are further classified into the following sub-parameters:
 - * Student Strength including Doctoral Students
 - * Faculty-student ratio with emphasis on permanent faculty (FSR)
 - * Combined metric for Faculty with PhD (or equivalent) and Experience (FQE)
 - * Total Budget and Its Utilization (CBTU)
- Research, consulting and collaborative performance– These parameters measure the research culture in the organization as seen through generation of IPR, international databases and interface with industry and fellow professionals.
- Graduation outcomes– It is the test of the level of effectiveness of the core teaching-learning activity in the institution. It measures the rate of students graduating and their success in finding appropriate placement in the industry, government inclusive of the rate of students taking up higher studies.
- Outreach & Inclusivity – A special emphasis is laid on the representation of women and socially challenged persons in student and faculty populations. It is also considered as a parameter in the outreach activities of the institution. Example:
 - * Percent Students from other states/countries (Region Diversity RD)
 - * Region Diversity
 - * Percentage of Women
 - * Economically and Socially Challenged Students (ESCS)
 - * Facilities for Physically Challenged Students (PCS)
- Perception– significant importance is given to the perception of the institutes by its stakeholders. This will be ascertained through Stakeholder Surveys.

Importance of NIRF Rankings:

- It would enable parents, students, teachers, educational institutions and other stakeholders to rank institutions on the basis of a set of objective parameters and a transparent process.
- The NIRF will facilitate a level playing field in ranking for institutions.
- Institutions which have been working in languages other than English and excelled relatively in the recent past will be identified and will be benefitted.
- A national ranking system, and one that is as exhaustive as this one will propel institutions into higher world rankings.

4. India needs a world class higher education system:**Vice President****Context**

- The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that a world-class higher education system was the need of the hour, addressing students and faculty members of REVA University
- Reminding the gathering about India's illustrious heritage, Shri Naidu said that India must resurrect the glory of the bygone era and take up the production and dissemination of knowledge.
- This can be done on a wide scale through initiatives such as the digitization of higher education through expansion of online courses, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) courses and distance education.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)

- A MOOC is an online course aimed at large-scale interactive participation and open access via the web, or simply, e-learning.
- In MOOC courses, students can engage in online learning from top international faculty at home in order to learn the basics of a topic, and then interact with an on-campus professor to problem-solve and reinforce understanding.

Why MOOCs are required

- Poor teaching standards in India: an online talent assessment company asserts that only 10 per cent of MBA graduated and 17 per cent of engineering graduates in India are employable.
- Poor accessibility: There is lack of quality education at basic levels and accessibility at later levels. The challenge for India lies in providing access to secondary and higher education to make the youth employable.
- The demand among Indian students for instruction from globally-recognised faculty is a strong driver for these partnerships.
- There is substantial interest among several top universities and business schools to offer such integrated MOOC courses.

Significance of MOOCs

- MOOCs are primarily developed to enhance the skills of youth.
- Those who could not get a chance to receive traditional college degrees from top institutions can now earn them through MOOCs
- MOOCs are more affordable than the traditional classes.
- It has the potential to train and educate billion more people by making education more accessible for everyone.
- Learners can learn from anywhere irrespective of their situation as long as they have internet access.

Drawbacks of MOOCs

- Digital literacy is important to make use of such facilities and in India it is very low.
- Relying on user-generated content can create a chaotic learning environment.
- Time and effort to that has to be put in by the students of MOOCs is comparatively more than the regular classroom students.
- Students have to regulate and set their own goals.

5. Professors of Practice - IIT Delhi**Context**

- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi is set to introduce a variety of new degrees and short-term certificate courses in the upcoming academic session
- One such program to enable working professionals who have vast experience in industrial circles, have worked in areas of importance and application programming, will teach at the institute is called "Professors of Practice."

Details

- There will be selection committee to assess whether they are experts in their fields and if so, they will get the opportunity to teach at IIT-D
- This programme will be started to encourage people working in various industries to come and teach students.
- This course will be offered to working professionals. Through these short-term certificate courses, students can move up and finally get a degree if they crack the examinations held.
- Quality will not be compromised but the college intends to broaden its base, to enable working professionals obtain a degree from IIT-D.
- A minor degree programme will be introduced for students to be trained in entrepreneurship

MISCELLANEOUS

1. 'Café Scientifique'

- It is the first of its kind initiative in the State of Kerala aimed at popularizing Science.
- The café envisages to bring science back into popular culture by demystifying scientific research for the public and empowering non-scientists to comfortably assess science and technology issues, particularly those that impact social policymaking.
- Café Scientifique is a grassroots public science initiative based on the French Café Philosophique model.
- Originating in England, the concept quickly gained popularity and was adopted by other countries.
- The plan is to organize meetings of science enthusiasts in the district every month at a café or a convenient place, where one or more scientists are invited to talk to the public about new developments in science.
- The project is also aimed at making science relevant, powerful and important to the public, especially the younger generations.
- Various topics such as universe, climate change, evolution, genetics and human-animal relations will be discussed in every monthly gathering.

2. CII Foundation Women Exemplar Awards

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Foundation Woman Exemplar Program recognizes exemplary women working at the grassroots.
- The program, since its inception in 2005, promotes women's empowerment at the community level by discovering, recognizing and supporting those who have, against all odds, excelled and contributed significantly to the development process in India.
- The exemplars are self-motivated individuals, who transform their own lives and that of their societies.

As part of the program, the Award is conferred on women working at the grassroots who have contributed significantly in the fields of:

- Education
- Health
- Micro Enterprise

Context

- The CII Woman Exemplar Awards for 2019 have been awarded to Bhimavva Chalwadi (education sector), Vanlalruati (health sector) and Nilima Tigga (microentrepreneurship).

3. Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI)

- Launched for the first time in 2013, the GTCI is a comprehensive annual benchmarking measuring how countries and cities grow, attract and retain talent, providing a unique resource for decision makers to understand the global talent competitiveness picture and develop strategies for boosting their competitiveness.
- It is based on research conducted by INSEAD in partnership with The Adecco Group and Tata Communications.

2019

- The theme, 'Entrepreneurial Talent and Global Competitiveness', attempts to identify ways in which companies, countries and cities can foster entrepreneurial talent.
- The report measures levels of Global Talent Competitiveness by looking at 68 variables.
- The 2019 index covers 125 national economies and 114 cities (respectively 119 and 90 in 2018) across all groups of income and levels of development.

India

- It is placed in the 80th position in the 2019 GTCI
- India scores well on growing talent, which is the only pillar where the country is positioned above the median.
- India's biggest challenge lies in improving its ability to attract and retain talent.
- There is a need to address its poor level of Internal Openness in particular with respect to weak gender equality and low tolerances towards minorities and immigrants—and its disappointing showing in lifestyle indicators.

Ranking of countries

- In this sixth edition, Switzerland continues to lead the 2019 Global Talent Competitiveness index, while Singapore and the United States come in second and third respectively as they did in 2018. The top three is followed by Scandinavian countries, Norway (4th), Denmark (5th), Finland (6th), and Sweden (7th).
- Yemen has finished at the bottom of this year's index at 125th, just below Congo (124th) and Burundi (123rd).
- GTCI report reveals that Switzerland, Singapore and the United States continue to lead the world in talent competitiveness, while countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa are seeing a progressive erosion of their talent base.

- China emerged as the best performer among the BRICS countries, with an overall position of 45th.

What does the report say?

- The report confirms that talent issues have become a mainstream concern for firms, nations and cities, with talent performance seen as a critical factor to growth and prosperity.
- The report also reveals that cities rather than countries are developing stronger roles as talent hubs and will be crucial to reshaping the global talent scene.
- This growing importance of cities is due to their greater flexibility and ability to adapt to new trends and patterns – as nimble economic units where policy can be changed more swiftly, cities are thus more attractive for talent, especially entrepreneurial talent.
- Policies and practices that bring about talent competitiveness in more developed countries are less susceptible to political and socioeconomic fluctuations. High-income economies have the stability to invest in lifelong learning, reinforcing skills, and attracting and retaining global talent.

4. Japanese Era Name

- It is also known as gengō
- It is an era name, used for the length of an emperor's reign in modern Japan
- It originated in ancient China, where an emperor was thought to control not just land but time as well
- Japan's first gengo was Taika, starting in 645.
- The first modern Japanese era was called Meiji (1868-1912), which was followed by Taisho (1912-1926), Showa (1926-1989) and Heisei.
- The longest era was Showa, which spanned 62 years and 13 days under the reign of Emperor Hirohito

Heisei

- The current period is known as "Heisei".
- It consists of two Chinese characters meaning "peace" and "achieve."
- It started on 8 January 1989, the day after the death of the Emperor Hirohito.
- His son, the 125th Emperor Akihito, acceded to the throne.
- It is scheduled to end on 30 April 2019

Reiwa

- It is expected to start on 1 May 2019, the day when Emperor Akihito's elder son, Naruhito, is expected to ascend to the throne as the 126th Emperor of Japan.
- Reiwa can be interpreted to mean 'auspicious' (rei) 'harmony' (wa).

Emperor-elect Naruhito's Reiwa era will face a formidable set of challenges.

- The country's rapidly ageing society and declining population mean that economic growth will require either a huge increase in the number of immigrants or a major technological breakthrough.
- Japan will also need to innovate to ensure it is not left out of the high-tech race for leadership at a time when artificial intelligence and robotics are reshaping the manufacturing ecosystem.
- Moreover, China's dominance in both the economic and strategic realms, coupled with the growing unpredictability of the U.S.'s commitment to Japan's defence will test Tokyo's strategic thinking, forcing it to seek out new allies and accommodations.

Conclusion

- The dawn of Reiwa will necessitate a series of more immediate, logistical changes.
- Government documents, stamps, newspapers, driving licences, and calendars will all need to switch to the new gengo from the Heisei system that's been in use for the last three decades.

5. Puratchi Thalaivar Dr. M.G. Ramachandran Central Railway Station

Context

- Puratchi Thalaivar Dr. M.G. Ramachandran Central Railway Station in Tamil Nadu, with 57 letters, missed the honour of having the longest railway station name by just an alphabet.

Details

- Earlier, the honour for the longest station name in India belonged to Venkatanarasimharajuvaripeta in Andhra Pradesh. The honour now belongs to Puratchi Thalaivar Dr. M.G. Ramachandran Central Railway Station or as most citizens call it Chennai Central.
 - * The Chennai central railway station was renamed on April 5, 2019, after the legendary actor and politician of Tamil Nadu
- The second longest railway station name in the country now is perhaps Krantivira Sangolli Rayanna Bengaluru City or as travellers call it Bengaluru The station was renamed in 2015 to honour the soldier of a princely State who fought against the British.
- The third longest name of an Indian railway station is Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, which has 33 letters. The station was renamed in 2017 by adding the word Maharaj

6. **Two Bengal govt. schemes win UN awards**

Context:

- Bengal has won the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) awards.

Details

- “Utkarsh Bangla” and “Sabooj Sathi” projects have won the prestigious World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) awards.
- “Utkarsh Bangla” got the topmost award and emerged a winner in Capacity Building Category.
- “Sabooj Sathi” ranked in the first five as a champion project under ICT application: E-Government category.

Utkarsh Bangla:

- Utkarsh Bangla Scheme was launched with an aim of providing vocational training to school dropouts.
- Objective of the scheme is to give vocational training to school dropouts by providing training ranging from 400 to 1200 hours free of charge.
 - * Under this scheme, beneficiaries will be trained in driving, tailoring, repairing television and other electronic equipment's, beautician courses etc.
 - * On completion the courses beneficiaries are given Certificates would be given.
 - * The state Vocational Education Department is the nodal agency in charge of implementing the scheme.
 - * The syllabus for courses under this scheme has been made in line with the National Vocational Education Qualification Framework.

Sabooj Sathi:

- Sabooj Sathi is a scheme of West Bengal government for distribution of bi-cycles to estimated 40 lakh students of class IX to XII studying in Govt. run and Govt. aided Schools and Madrasahs.
- The scheme was launched in September 2015.
- The objective of the scheme is to empower the students, especially the girls and reduce drop outs in higher education.

WSIS awards:

- WSIS Prizes is a unique international contest developed in response to requests from the WSIS stakeholders to create an effective mechanism to evaluate and recognize individuals, governments, civil society, local, regional and international agencies, research institutions and private-sector companies for outstanding success in implementing development oriented strategies that leverage the power of ICTs as an enabler of the development.

- The WSIS Prizes contest is an integral part of the WSIS stocktaking process; set up in 2004 to assist WSIS implementation and follow-up.
- The contest was held for the first time in 2012, and rapidly gained attention and popularity within the ICT for Development (ICT4D) community.
- Building upon the outcomes of the United Nations General Assembly Overall Review on WSIS as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WSIS Prizes reflect close linkages with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The WSIS Prizes contest serves as the platform for identifying and showcasing the success stories across the WSIS Action Lines defined in the Geneva Plan of Action and SDGs.
- It also provides us with models that can be replicated in the interests of empowering the community at the local level, providing everyone with an opportunity to participate in the contest and, most importantly, recognizing the efforts made by stakeholders to contribute to the development of society and their commitment to achievement of both the WSIS goals and SDGs.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following statements:

1. IUCN Red List is an information source on the global conservation status of animal, fungi and plant species.
2. IUCN Red List divides the species into five categories.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

2. Which of the following statements is correct with respect to SAMADHAN Portal?

- A. It is a dedicated web portal for conciliation, arbitration and adjudication of the industrial disputes.
- B. It is a dedicated web portal for providing a functional link between education and industry/service sectors on a sustainable basis.
- C. It is a dedicated web portal for bovine germplasm.
- D. It is a dedicated web portal ensuring the security of passengers especially women passengers during Railway travel.

3. Consider the following statements with respect to the World Government Summit:

1. It is a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of governments worldwide.
2. World Government Summit 2019 was held in Delhi, India.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

4. Consider the following statements with respect to E-AUSHADHI Portal:

1. The portal was launched by the Ministry of health and family welfare.
2. It is a portal for Online Licensing System of AYUSH Medicine.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

5. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to GHUMOT?

1. It is a drum covered with the animal hide on both sides.
2. It has been notified as the heritage instrument of Goa.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

6. Consider the following statements with respect to Dhimsa:

1. It is a tribal dance form.
2. The dance originated in Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

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

7. Select the INCORRECT statement:

- A. The First schedule contains the list of states and union territories and their territories
- B. The Fifth Schedule contains provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- C. The Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India defines and specifies allocation of powers and functions between Union & States.
- D. The Tenth Schedule contains provisions as to disqualification on ground of defection.

8. Who among the following do not find mention in the Second Schedule of the Indian Constitution?

1. Prime Minister
2. President
3. Attorney General

Selected the correct answer:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

9. Consider the following Statements:

1. Danda Nata is one of the oldest folk dance forms of Orissa.
2. The dance is performed by men and women to Worship Lord Shiva

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

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

10. "Living Planet Report" is published by:

- A. United Nations Environment Programme
- B. World Health Organisation
- C. NITI Aayog
- D. World Wide Fund for Nature

11. Mukundra Hill Tiger Reserve is in the state of

- A. Rajasthan
- B. Madhya Pradesh
- C. Kerala
- D. Tamil Nadu

12. Consider the following statements with respect to cyclone Titli:

1. Cyclone Titli caused immense damage in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.
2. It was named by Pakistan.

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. Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES) is an intergovernmental body registered under the United Nations.
2. India is the chairman of the body.

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

14. Consider the following statements:

1. Hurricanes are tropical storms that form over the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific.
2. Cyclones are formed over the South Pacific and Indian Ocean.
3. Typhoons are formed over the Northwest Pacific Ocean.

Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

15. Consider the following statements:

1. India is the first country to have reported the ability to shoot down space objects from ground or airborne sources with the recent launch of ASAT.
2. DRDO-developed anti-satellite system A-SAT successfully destroyed a live satellite in the Low Earth Orbit

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

16. Consider the following statements:

1. Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi was set up to provide financial assistance to patients, living below poverty line and who are suffering from major life-threatening diseases.
2. Tamil Nadu is the first state to release a Rare Diseases and Orphan Drugs Policy.

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

17. Consider the following statements:

1. Golden Triangle is the region between the borders of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.
2. Golden Crescent is the region spanning across Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.

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

18. Global Slavery Index is published by:

- A. UN Commission on Human Rights
- B. Walk Free Foundation
- C. UN Development Programme
- D. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

19. Which of the following is not included in the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List?

- A. Kumbh Mela
- B. Bharatanatyam
- C. Yoga
- D. Chhau Dance

20. Consider the following questions:

1. It has been announced every year on the occasion of Republic Day since 1950
2. All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. However, except doctors and scientists, government servants including those working with PSUs, are not eligible for the Padma Awards.

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

21. Democracy Index is published by:

- A. Economist Intelligence Unit
- B. INSEAD
- C. UN Development Programme
- D. UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

22. Consider the following statements:

1. Champaran Satyagraha was Gandhiji's first satyagraha in India.
2. It occurred in Champaran district of Gujarat in 1917.

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

23. Mamita is a folk dance of the North Eastern State of

- A. Assam
- B. Sikkim
- C. Tripura
- D. Arunachal Pradesh

24. Consider the following statements:

1. Leprosy is an infectious disease.
2. India's National Leprosy Eradication Programme is a centrally sponsored Scheme.

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

25. Consider the following statements:

1. The Wancho are a tribal people inhabiting the Patkai hills of Longding District in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India. The Wancho language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family.
2. The prime festival of the Wancho is Oriah, a festival between March to April, for a period of six to twelve days interspersed with prayer, songs and dances.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

26. Consider the following statements:

1. CRR indicates the quantum of cash that banks are required to keep with the Reserve Bank as a proportion of their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL).
2. SLR prescribes the amount of money that banks must invest in securities issued by the government. This is not kept with RBI but with banks themselves.

Which among the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

27. Consider the following statements:

1. Sikkim shares its international borders with China, Nepal, and Bhutan.
2. Mizoram shares its international borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

28. Consider the following statements:

1. The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body responsible for administering elections in India.
2. According to Article 324 of Indian Constitution, the Election Commission of India has superintendence, direction, and control of the entire process for conduct of elections to Parliament and Legislature (state legislative assembly & state legislative council) of every State and to the offices of President and Vice-President of India.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

29. Consider the following statements:

- 1) The boundary between the Sun's interior and the solar atmosphere is called the photosphere. It is what we see as the visible "surface" of the Sun.
- 2) The lower region of the solar atmosphere is called the chromosphere. Its name comes from the Greek root chroma (meaning color), for it appears bright red when viewed during a solar eclipse.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

30. Consider the following statements:

1. Neelakurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthiana*) is a shrub that grow abundantly in the shola grasslands of Western Ghats in India.
2. The Nilgiris, which literally means the blue mountains, got its name from the purplish blue flowers of Neelakurinji that blossoms gregariously once in 12 years.

Which among the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

31. Consider the following statements:

1. The International Space Station is in low Earth orbit, or LEO. LEO is the first 100 to 200 miles (161 to 322 km) of space.
2. Any satellite with an orbital path going over or near the poles maintains a polar orbit. Polar orbits are usually low Earth orbits.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

32. Consider the following statements:

1. The United Arab Emirates consists of seven emirates. They are Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah, and Umm al-Quwain.
2. The UAE is bordering Oman and Saudi Arabia and has maritime borders with Iran.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

33. Consider the following statements:

1. Bengal Florican or Bengal Bustard is Native to Indian Subcontinent.
2. It is Critically Endangered as per the IUCN Red List.

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

34. Dudhwa National Park is in

- A. Gujarat
- B. Rajasthan
- C. Madhya Pradesh
- D. Uttar Pradesh

35. Consider the following statements:

1. Periyar River is the second longest River in Kerala.
2. The Idukki Dam is the largest hydro-electric project in Kerala and lies on the Periyar.

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

36. Consider the following statements:

1. The main objective of the UJALA program is to provide LPG connections to BPL households.
2. The Electricity Distribution Company and Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) are implementing the programme.

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

37. Consider the following statements:

1. Bagru Block printing is traditional technique of printing followed in Rajasthan.
2. It is done by the Chippa Community.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

38. Consider the following statements:

1. Artillery gun Dhanush is the first long-range artillery gun to be produced in India.
2. It is an upgraded version of the Swedish 155-mm Bofors howitzers.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

39. Consider the following statements:

1. Konyaks are one of the major Naga tribes.
2. They have the least population among the Nagas.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

40. Consider the following statements about Bramble Cay Melomys:

1. It is an island rodent.
2. It is considered Great Barrier Reef's only endemic mammal.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

41. Consider the following statements:

1. The Indian Ocean Conference is initiated by India Foundation along with its partners from Singapore, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.
2. It was held for the first time at Hanoi.

Which of the following statement/s in/are correct?

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

42. Consider the following statements:

1. India is the founding member of Asian Development Bank.
2. India is one of the top 5 shareholders in ADB.

Which of the following statement/s in/are correct?

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

43. Which of the following countries border the Caspian Sea?

1. Azerbaijan
2. Russia
3. Kazakhstan
4. Turkmenistan
5. Iran

Choose the correct answer:

- A. 1, 2, 3
- B. 1, 3, 4, 5
- C. 3, 4, 5
- D. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

44. Consider the following statements with respect to International Telecommunication Union

1. It is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies – ICTs.
2. It is a member of the United Nations Development Group.

Which of the following statement/s in/are correct?

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

45. Consider the following statements:

1. Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) was previously named as the Bangkok Agreement.
2. It is an initiative of UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

46. Consider the following statements:

1. Project Sashakt is a comprehensive plan for the resolution of stressed assets in banking sector.
2. The strategy for Project Sashakt was recommended by Sunil Mehta Committee.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

47. Logistics Performance Index is released by

- A. World Trade Organisation
- B. World Bank
- C. United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
- D. International Trade Centre

48. Consider the following statements:

1. Green bonds are debt instruments the proceeds of which are used for renewable energy projects.
2. YES Bank was the first to issue the first green bond in India

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

49. Consider the following statements:

1. The Rome Statute is a multilateral treaty that serves as the International Court of Justice -ICJ's governing document.
2. India has signed Rome Statute.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

50. Consider the following statements:

1. In the aftermath of Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Gandhiji relinquished his title 'Kaiser-e-hind' bestowed on him by the British.
2. 'Kaiser-e-hind' title was bestowed upon by the British for Gandhiji's services during the Boer War in South Africa.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

51. Consider the following statements:

1. The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.
2. The ICJ is the successor of the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ)

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

52. Consider the following statements:

1. The Permanent Court of Arbitration is an intergovernmental organization located at The Hague in the Netherlands.
2. The Permanent Court of Arbitration is an agency of the United Nations.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?:

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

53. Consider the following statements:

1. Belgium shares borders with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.
- 2) The North Sea is bordered by Great Britain to the west and southwest, northwest by the Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands, east and northeast by Norway and Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands to the southeast, with Belgium and France to the south.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

54. Consider the following statements:

1. Zebrafish and salamanders can normally regenerate their hearts unlike humans and many mammals.
2. Zebrafish is a tropical fish belonging to the minnow family. The ability of zebrafish to produce thousand of embryos in a synchronous manner has made zebrafish an invaluable tool for genetic and chemical screens.

Which among the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

55. Consider the following statements:

1. The basic object of the Right to Information Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense.
2. Section 8 (2) of the RTI Act, mandates that the government cannot refuse information if disclosure in public interest overshadows certain "protected interests".

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

56. Which of the following international organizations published the "World Economic Outlook"?

- A. IMF
- B. World Bank
- C. World Economic Forum (WEF)
- D. Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

57. Consider the following statements with respect to International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project:

1. India is the founding member of the INSTC project
2. Pakistan is a member state of the INSTC

Which of the following statements/s is/are correct?

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

58. Consider the following statements about Sangam literature

1. Sangam literature is associated with the Pandya kingdom.
2. Silappadikaram and Manimekalai are the two epics of Sangam literature.

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

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

59. Consider the following statements:

1. Chaitanya- Preached Bhaktism in Maharashtra
2. Jnaneshwara- Preached Bhaktism in Bengal

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

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

60. Consider the following statements:

1. Small black holes have masses 5 to 20 times the mass of the sun.
2. There exists a super massive black hole at the centre of Milky Way galaxy.

Which of the above statement/s is/are correct?

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

61. Cassini Spacecraft Mission was aimed at exploring

- A. Saturn
- B. A dwarf planet Ceres
- C. Jupiter
- D. The asteroid belt

62. Consider the following statements:

1. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana covers both urban and rural households
2. The scheme comes under the Ministry of Finance.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

63. Which of the following schemes have been subsumed under Ayushman Bharat – National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM)?

- A. Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana
- B. Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme
- C. National Life Insurance Scheme
- D. Both a and b

64. Which among the following is not a subsidiary of the RBI?

- A. National Housing Bank
- B. Small Industries Development Bank of India
- C. Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited
- D. Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation

65. Consider the following statements with respect to western disturbances:

1. They are low-pressure depressions which occurs during winters, particularly the northern states of India.
2. They are basically a type of local winds which occur in north-western part of India.

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

66. Where is the famous Meenakshi Temple found?

- A. Madurai
- B. Hampi
- C. Rameshwaram
- D. Khajuraho

67. On which river bank the famous Meenakshi Temple of Madurai is found?

- A. Palar river
- B. Cauvery river
- C. Vaigai River
- D. Pennar river

68. Consider the following statements regarding The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA):

1. Its vision is to promote safe and efficient Air Transportation through regulation and proactive safety oversight system.
2. It is headquartered in Bangalore.
3. The Government of India is planning to replace the organization with a Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), modelled on the lines of the American Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 & 2 only
- C. 1 & 3
- D. None

69. Where was the recent India - Vietnam naval exercise held?

- A. Visakhapatnam, India
- B. Kochi, India
- C. Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam
- D. Gulf of Cambay, India

70. Consider the following statements:

1. Repo or repurchase rate is the interest at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks.
2. Repo rate is used by monetary authorities to control inflation.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

71. Consider the following statements:

1. India hosts 4 biodiversity hotspots.
2. Western Ghats is identified as one of the Biodiversity hotspots in India.
3. Western Ghats is identified by UNESCO as a Natural World Heritage Site in India.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

72. Which of the following Schedule of the Constitution of India has to be amended to provide for the formation of a new State?

- A. First Schedule
- B. Second Schedule
- C. Third Schedule
- D. Ninth Schedule

73. The Constitution of India empowers the Supreme Court to adjudicate disputes between the Centre and the States through

- A. Writ Jurisdiction
- B. Advisory Jurisdiction
- C. Appellate Jurisdiction
- D. Original Jurisdiction

74. Consider the following statements:

1. Banks Board Bureau is a statutory body.
2. It was a part of the Indradhanush plan of the government.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

75. Arrange the neighbouring countries of India in decreasing order of border length:

1. Pakistan
2. Nepal
3. China
4. Bangladesh
5. Afghanistan

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- B. 4, 3, 1, 2, 5
- C. 2, 1, 3, 4, 5
- D. 4, 1, 2, 3, 5

76. Which of the following rivers flow into the Arabian Sea?

1. Narmada
2. Godavari
3. Tapi
4. Sabarmati

Choose the correct option:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 4
- C. 1, 3 and 4
- D. All of the above

77. World Energy Outlook (WEO) is published by:

- A. International Energy Agency
- B. Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
- C. Sustainable Development Solutions Network
- D. International Atomic Energy Agency

78. Consider the following statements:

1. Bureau of Energy Efficiency is a statutory body under the Ministry of Power
2. BEE assists in developing policies and strategies with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

79. Consider the following statements:

1. UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment.
2. UNEA is the governing body of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
3. UNEA meets annually

Which of the given 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

80. Consider the following statements with respect to World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

1. Its secretariat is headquartered in Geneva
2. India is a member of WMO

Which of the statement/s is/are correct?

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

81. The Gini coefficient measures:

- A. Income inequality
- B. Inflation
- C. Unemployment
- D. Economic Growth

82. Consider the following statements with respect to Aegean Sea

1. It is located between Greece and Turkey.
2. It is connected to the Marmara Sea through the Dardanelles Strait.

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

83. The "Ilbert Bill Controversy" can be linked to which of the following viceroys?

- A. Lord Hardinge
- B. Lord Rippon
- C. Lord Lytton
- D. Lord Curzon

84. 'Abhinav Bharat Society' was founded by:

- A. V D Savarkar
- B. Bhagat Singh
- C. Prafulla Chaki
- D. Barindra Kumar Ghosh

85. Consider the following statements:

- 1. The theme for Earth Day 2019 is 'Protect Our Species'.
- 2. The Earth Day was first celebrated in 2017.

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

86. The Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendations of a committee consisting of:

- 1. Prime Minister
- 2. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha
- 3. Chief Justice of India
- 4. Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM

Choose the correct answer:

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
- B. 1, 2 and 4 only
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

87. Consider the following statements with respect to Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga Project:

- 1. It is a project of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation.
- 2. The project is being implemented by National Mission for Clean Ganga.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

88. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Chabahar Port is Iran's only oceanic port.
- 2. It is located at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

89. Consider the following statements with respect to Ryotwari System:

- 1. The government of Lord William Bentinck introduced the Ryotwari system of land revenue.
- 2. Under the system, the taxes were directly collected by the government from the peasants.
- 3. The system recognised the peasants or cultivators as the owners of the land.

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

90. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Echidnas are the only egg laying mammals.
- 2. Echidnas are native to the Indian Sub-continent.

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

91. Consider the following statements with respect to LIBOR:

- 1. LIBOR is based on seven different currencies.
- 2. It is the average interest rate at which major global banks borrow from one another.

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

92. Consider the following statements:

- 1. European Space Agency's InSight mission is a robotic lander designed to study the deep interior of the planet Mars.
- 3. It is the first outer space robotic explorer to study in-depth the "inner space" of Mars.

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

93. Consider the following statements:

1. Chang'e 4 is the first probe ever to explore the dark side of the Moon.
2. One of the tasks of the probe includes observing the Solar Corona

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

94. The Wangala Festival is celebrated in the region of

- A. Goa
- B. Arunachal Pradesh
- C. Meghalaya
- D. Uttarakhand

95. Consider the following statements about Power grids in India

1. India has four Electricity Grids
2. All of them are connected except Southern grid
3. All the grids are being run by the state-owned Power Grid Corporation

Which of above statements are incorrect?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

96. Bepicolombo is a mission to study which planet?

- A. Mercury
- B. Venus
- C. Mars
- D. Jupiter

97. With reference to Gram negative Bacteria, consider the following statements

1. Gram negative bacteria have additional outer membrane, which prevents drugs from getting inside.
2. Gram negative bacteria are generally considered the more difficult to treat.

Which of above statements are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both
- D. None

98. Consider the following statements, regarding the recently developed 'ultrasensitive quantum thermometer' at Jamia Millia Islamia:

1. This thermometer has been developed using graphene quantum dots.
2. The device can find widespread applications in cryogenic temperature sensing. Since the sensor has high sensitivity and ability to measure minute changes in temperature, it will be useful in the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare industry to measure the incubation temperature of biological cells and molecules and the automobile industry to measure the ignition temperature within the engine.

Which among the above statements is/are correct?

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

99. Consider the following statements with reference to the 'Bharati' script:

1. The 'Bharati' script is a unified script currently developed for nine Indian languages.
2. The scripts that have been integrated include Devnagari, Bengali, Gurmukhi, Gujarati, Oriya, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil.

Which among the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

100. What is the geographical divide that separates Sri Lanka from India?

- A. Palk Strait
- B. Malacca Strait
- C. Hormuz Strait
- D. Magellan strait

ANSWER KEYS

1. Answer: A

Explanation:

IUCN Red list divides species into nine categories: Not Evaluated, Data Deficient, Least Concern, Near Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered, Critically Endangered, Extinct in the Wild and Extinct.

2. Answer: A

Explanation:

Recently, the Ministry of Labour and Employment launched Samadhan (Software Application for Monitoring and Disposal, Handling of Industrial Disputes) portal. It is a dedicated web portal for conciliation, arbitration and adjudication of the industrial disputes. It brings all stakeholders – Government, Industry and Labour – involved in industrial disputes on a single integrated platform. Workers have the option to go to the labour court directly in case no action is initiated within 45 days of raising a dispute online, putting a time limit on the process which presently is missing.

3. Answer: A

Explanation:

The World Government Summit 2019 was held in Dubai, UAE. Each year, the Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments, focusing on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity. It comprises a wide network of leaders of the public and private sectors, and inspires them to think collectively and creatively about disruptive intersections between government and innovation.

4. Answer: B

Explanation:

e-AUSHADHI portal for Online Licensing System of AYUSH Medicine was launched by the Ministry of AYUSH.

5. Answer: B

Explanation:

Ghumot, a type of percussion instrument that has been notified as a heritage instrument of Goa. It is also known as Ghumat, Dakki or Budike. It is part of the Mando, a musical form of the Goan Catholics that combines elements of both Indian and Western music. It is also part of the Zagor folk dance and Dulpod (Goan dance song).

6. Answer: A

Explanation:

It is a tribal dance form, is performed by the Porja caste women. The dance is originated in Koraput district in Odisha but has almost become an official dance of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

7. Answer: B

Explanation:

Fifth Schedule contains provisions as to the Administration and Control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes. Sixth Schedule contains provisions as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

8. Answer: C

Explanation:

Second schedule lists the emoluments for holders of constitutional offices such as salaries of President, Vice President, Ministers, Judges, Speaker & Deputy Speaker of the house of people, Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Council of States and the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman of the Legislative Council of a State and Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.

9. Answer: A

Explanation:

- The dance is done mainly to worship Lord Shiva.
- Only male persons take part in this festival.
- The participants are known as the 'Bhoktas'.

10. Answer: D

Explanation:

The Living Planet Report is published every two years by WWF since 1998; it is based on a Living Planet Index and ecological footprint calculation.

11. Answer: A

Explanation:

The park got the nod from National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in 2013 and the state (Rajasthan) bagged its third tiger reserve in the form of the Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve after Ranthambhore and Sariska. State governments are authorised, on the recommendations of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, to notify an area as a tiger reserve under section 38 V of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

12. Answer: C

Explanation:

Titli, brought with itself, strong winds, torrents of rain and a metre high storm surge which inundated the coastal areas. While the IMD said it was because of their warnings that the loss could be minimized, cyclone Titli and the ensuing flood caused more devastation in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh than expected. The cyclone was named by Pakistan.

13. Answer: C

Explanation:

The Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES) is an international and intergovernmental institution, owned and managed by its Member States, for the generation and application of early warning information. It was established on 30 April 2009, and was registered with the United Nations on 1 July 2009. RIMES operates from its regional early warning center located at the campus of the Asian Institute of Technology in Pathumthani, Thailand. India is the chairman of the body.

14. Answer: D

Explanation:

Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are all tropical storms. They are all the same thing but are given different names depending on where they appear. When they reach populated areas they usually bring very strong wind and rain which can cause a lot of damage.

15. Answer: B

Explanation:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently announced that the DRDO-developed anti-satellite system A-SAT successfully destroyed a live satellite in the Low Earth Orbit. With this test, dubbed as Mission Shakti, India is only the fourth country after the U.S., Russia and China to have the technology. ASAT weapons are missile-based systems to attack moving satellites. So far the United States, China and Russia were the only ones who've reported the ability to shoot down space objects from ground or airborne sources.

16. Answer: A

Explanation:

The RAN was set up to provide financial assistance to patients, living below poverty line and who are suffering from major life-threatening diseases, to receive medical treatment at any of the super speciality Hospitals/Institutes or other Government hospitals. Karnataka is the first state to release a Rare Diseases and Orphan Drugs Policy.

17. Answer: C

Explanation:

Both the statements are true.

18. Answer: B

Explanation:

Global Slavery Index (GSI) is published by the Walk Free Foundation, a global human rights organization with a mission to end modern slavery in a generation. The report looks at prevalence (the percentage of a country's population that is enslaved) as well as the total number of people living in modern slavery in each country.

19. Answer: B

20. Answer: B

Explanation:

Padma Awards, which were instituted in the year 1954, is announced every year on the occasion of Republic Day except for brief interruption(s) during the years 1978 and 1979 and 1993 to 1997.

All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. However, except doctors and scientists, government servants including those working with PSUs, are not eligible for the Padma Awards.

21. Answer: A

Explanation:

The Democracy Index is an index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a UK-based company. Its intention is to measure the state of democracy in 167 countries, of which 166 are sovereign states and 164 are UN member states. The index was first published in 2006, with updates for 2008, 2010 and later years. The index is based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories, measuring pluralism, civil liberties and political culture. In addition to a numeric score and a ranking, the index categorises each country in one of four regime types: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.

22. Answer: A

Explanation:

The first Satyagraha movements inspired by Mahatma Gandhi occurred in Champaran district of Bihar in the year 1917. The Champaran Satyagraha was the first to be started, but the word Satyagraha was used for the first time in Anti Rowlatt Act agitation.

23. Answer: C

Explanation:

Mamita is a folk dance of Tripura. It is performed on the occasion of Mamita festival, which is the harvest festival of Tripuri People.

24. Answer: C

Explanation:

Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae* and is highly contagious. National Leprosy Eradication Programme of India is a centrally sponsored Health Scheme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare which aims to eradicate leprosy from India.

25. Answer: B

Explanation:

- The Wancho are a tribal people inhabiting the Patkai hills of Longding District in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India.
- They have a population of 35,000. Culturally Naga, they are ethnically related to the Nocte and Konyak Naga of the Mon and Tirap districts.
- The Wancho language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family.
- Tattooing plays a major role among the Wancho tribe. According to tradition, a man is tattooed on his four limbs and his entire face, with the exception of certain regions around the eyes and the lips. The women adorn themselves with necklaces and bangles, along with some light tattooing as well.
- The prime festival of the Wancho is Oriah, a festival between March to April, for a period of six to twelve days interspersed with prayer, songs and dances.

26. Answer: D

Explanation:

- CRR indicates the quantum of cash that banks are required to keep with the Reserve Bank as a proportion of their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL).
- SLR prescribes the amount of money that banks must invest in securities issued by the government. This is not kept with RBI but with banks themselves.
- The banks and other financial institutions in India have to keep a fraction of their total net time and demand liabilities in the form of liquid assets such as G-secs, precious metals, approved securities, etc. The Ratio of these liquid assets to the total demand and time liabilities is called Statutory Liquidity Ratio.

27. Answer: c

Explanation:

- Sikkim shares its international borders with China, Nepal, and Bhutan.
- Mizoram shares its borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh

28. Answer: C

Explanation:

- The Election Commission of India is a constitutional body responsible for administering elections in India.
- According to Article 324 of Indian Constitution, the Election Commission of India has superintendence, direction, and control of the entire process for conduct of elections to Parliament and Legislature (state legislative assembly & state legislative council) of every State and to the offices of President and Vice-President of India.

- The President has the power to select Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
- They have a tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- They have the same status and receive pay and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India.

29. Answer: C

Explanation:

- The boundary between the Sun's interior and the solar atmosphere is called the photosphere. It is what we see as the visible "surface" of the Sun.
- The lower region of the solar atmosphere is called the chromosphere. Its name comes from the Greek root chroma (meaning color), for it appears bright red when viewed during a solar eclipse.
- There are three main parts to the Sun's interior: the core, the radiative zone, and the convective zone. The core is at the center. It the hottest region, where the nuclear fusion reactions that power the Sun occur. Moving outward, next comes the radiative (or radiation) zone. Its name is derived from the way energy is carried outward through this layer, carried by photons as thermal radiation. The third and final region of the solar interior is named the convective (or convection) zone. It is also named after the dominant mode of energy flow in this layer; heat moves upward via roiling convection.

30. Answer: D

Explanation:

Neelakurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthiana*) is a shrub to grow abundantly in the shola grasslands of Western Ghats in India.

The Nilgiris, which literally means the blue mountains, got its name from the purplish blue flowers of Neelakurinji that blossoms gregariously once in 12 years.

31. Answer: C

Explanation:

- The International Space Station is in low Earth orbit, or LEO. LEO is the first 100 to 200 miles (161 to 322 km) of space.
- Any satellite with an orbital path going over or near the poles maintains a polar orbit. Polar orbits are usually low Earth orbits.

32. Answer: C

Explanation:

- The United Arab Emirates consists of seven emirates. They are Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras al-Khaimah, Fujairah, and Umm al-Quwain.
- The UAE is bordering Oman and Saudi Arabia and has maritime borders with Iran.

33. Answer: C

34. Answer: D

35. Answer: B

Explanation:

Periyar is the longest river and the river with the largest discharge potential in the Indian state of Kerala. It is one of the few perennial rivers in the region and provides drinking water for several major towns.

36. Answer: B

Explanation:

"UJALA" – an acronym for Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All. Under the scheme, 20W LED tube lights and BEE 5-star rated energy efficient fans are also distributed to the consumers. The main objective of UJALA program is to promote efficient lighting, enhance awareness on using efficient equipment which reduce electricity bills and help preserve environment.

37. Answer: C

Explanation: Bagru Block printing is a traditional technique of printing with natural colour done by the Chippa community in Bagru village of Rajasthan. The motifs printed at Bagru are large with bold lines. The motifs include wildflowers, buds, leaves and printed geometrical patterns. The main colors used in Bagru are Red and Black.

38. Answer: C

39. Answer: A

Explanation: Konyaks are one of the major Naga tribes. The Konyaks have the largest population among the Nagas. They inhabit the Mon District— also known as ‘The Land of The Anghs’. Aoleng, a festival celebrated in the first week of April (1-6) to welcome the spring is the biggest festival of the Konyaks. Another festival, ‘Lao Ong Mo’, is the traditional harvest festival celebrated in the months of August/September.

40. Answer: C

Explanation:

Australia officially declared a Great Barrier Reef rodent extinct, making it the first mammal believed to have been killed off by human-induced climate change. The rat-like Bramble Cay melomys — whose only known habitat was a small sandy island in far northern Australia — has not been spotted in a decade. The Melomys rubicola, considered the Great Barrier Reef’s only endemic mammal species, was first discovered on the cay in 1845 by Europeans who shot the “large rats” for sport.

41. Answer: A

Explanation:

Three successful editions of the Conference have been hosted so far. The latest one was held at Hanoi.

42. Answer: C

Explanation:

ADB was founded in 1966 and India is a founding. The ADB has 67-member countries, including — 48 from the Asian region. 5 shareholders in ADB are: Japan (15.6%), United States (15.6%), People’s Republic of China (6.4%), India (6.3%) and Australia (5.8%). It provides direct assistance to private enterprises of developing member countries through equity investments and loans.

43. Answer: D

44. Answer: C

45. Answer: C

Explanation:

The Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), previously known as the Bangkok Agreement was signed in 1975. It is the oldest preferential trade agreement between countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Seven Participating States- Bangladesh, China, India, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, and Sri Lanka are the parties to the APTA. It is an initiative of UNESCAP (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).

46. Answer: C

Explanation:

Project Sashakt is a comprehensive plan for the resolution of stressed assets in banking sector. It aims to strengthen the credit capacity, credit culture and credit portfolio of public sector banks. It is a five-pronged strategy towards resolution of stressed assets, as recommended by Sunil Mehta Committee.

47. Answer: B

Explanation:

Logistic Performance Index (LPI) is released by World Bank bi-annually, by comparing across 160 countries on logistic sector performance. Logistics Performance Index (LPI) analyses countries through six indicators namely custom, International Shipment, tracking & tracing of consignment, Infrastructure, logistic competence, and timeliness of consignment.

48. Answer: C

Explanation:

Green bonds are debt instruments like normal bonds, but the proceeds are used for renewable energy projects, or for services that are ecologically sustainable. The bond is voluntary and may be issued by a financial institution, the government or even a company to raise funds for a defined period. India entered the green bond market in 2015 with the YES Bank issuing the first green bond for financing the renewable and clean energy projects particularly, for wind and solar.

49. Answer: D

Explanation:

The International Criminal Court is an intergovernmental organization and international tribunal that sits in Hague in the Netherlands. The ICC has the jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression. The Rome Statute is a multilateral treaty which serves as the ICC's foundational and governing document. States which become party to the Rome Statute by ratifying it become member states of the ICC. India has not signed the Rome Statute.

50. Answer: C

Explanation:

On the day of the festival of Baisakhi on 13th April 1919 in Jallianwala Bagh, a public garden in Amritsar, a crowd of non-violent protestors had gathered. Also among the crowd were pilgrims who had come to celebrate Baisakhi. General Dyer came there with his troops and blocked the only narrow entrance to the garden. Then, without warning, he ordered his troops to fire at the unarmed crowd which included children as well. The indiscriminate firing went on for about 10 minutes which resulted in the deaths of at least 1000 people and injured more than 1500 people. This tragedy came as a rude shock to Indians and totally destroyed their faith in the British system of justice. In protest against the massacre and the British failure to give due justice to the victims, Rabindranath Tagore gave up his knighthood and Gandhiji relinquished his title 'Kaiser-e-hind' bestowed on him by the British for his services during the Boer War in South Africa.

51. Answer: C

Explanation:

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) sometimes called the World Court, is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It settles legal disputes submitted by states and gives advisory opinions on legal issues referred by authorized U.N. organs and specialized agencies. Through its opinions and rulings, the ICJ also serves as a source of international law. The ICJ is the successor of the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), which was established by the League of Nations in 1920 and began its first session in 1922. After the Second World War, both the League and the PCIJ were dissolved and replaced by the United Nations and ICJ, respectively.

52. Answer: A

Explanation:

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) is an intergovernmental organization located at The Hague in the Netherlands. The PCA is not a court in the traditional sense but provides services of arbitral tribunal to resolve disputes that arise out of international agreements between member states, international organizations or private parties. The organization is not a United Nations agency, but the PCA is an official United Nations Observer.

53. Answer: C

Explanation:

- The Belgium shares borders with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.
- The North Sea is bordered by Great Britain to the west and southwest, northwest by the Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands, east and northeast by Norway and Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands to the southeast, with Belgium and France to the south.

54. Answer: C

Explanation:

- Zebrafish and salamanders can normally regenerate their hearts unlike humans and many mammals.
- Zebrafish is a tropical fish belonging to the minnow family. The ability of zebrafish to produce thousand of embryos in a synchronous manner has made zebrafish an invaluable tool for genetic and chemical screens

55. Answer: C

Explanation:

- Zeb The basic object of the Right to Information Act is to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense.
- Section 8 (2) of the RTI Act, mandates that the government cannot refuse information if disclosure in public interest overshadows certain “protected interests”.

56. Answer: A

Explanation:

The IMF publishes the “World Economic Outlook”.

57. Answer: A

Explanation:

The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe. Russia, Iran and India signed the agreement for the NSTC project on the in 2002. All three countries are founding member states on the project. Other important member states include Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Belarus with other states having varying levels of involvement.

58. Answer: C

Explanation:

- Tamil language is the oldest one among the South Indian languages. The earliest phase of Tamil literature is associated with the three Sangams.
- Sangams were the societies of learned men established in the Pandya kingdom. Each Sangam comprised of a number of distinguished poets and learned scholars.

- All literary works were submitted to these Sangams where learned scholars selected the best ones from different works and set their seal of approval.
- The Sangam literature was compiled between A.D. 300 and 600.
- Ettutogai collection (the eight anthologies) is considered to be the earliest one belonging to 3rd century B.C. to 3rd century A.D.
- Tirukkural written by Thiruvalluvar is the best of the minor didactic poems. Its teachings are considered as an everlasting inspiration and guide to the Tamilians.
- Silappadikaram and Manimekalai are the two Tamil epics. These are important sources for the construction of the early history of south India.

59. Answer: D

Explanation:

- Chaitanya, the devotee of Krishna, was a religious teacher who preached in Bengal. He composed many hymns dedicated to Krishna.
- Chaitanya had travelled to different parts of the country and gathered a group of his followers. At the end of his life, he settled at Puri in Orissa.
- In Maharashtra, the Bhakti ideology was preached by Jnaneshvara. Jnaneshvara had translated Gita in Marathi.

60. Answer: C

Explanation:

Small black holes are called stellar-mass black holes. They have masses similar to those of larger stars — about five to 20 times the mass of the sun. The other kind is supermassive black holes, which are millions to billions of times more massive than the sun. Supermassive black holes are found at the centre of most galaxies, including our own Milky Way. The one in Milky Way is called Sagittarius A.

61. Answer: A

62. Answer: C

Explanation:

Both statements are correct. Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojna (PMJDY) is a programme for financial inclusion to cover all unbanked households in India, whether in urban or rural area, and aims at providing affordable financial services like savings & deposit accounts, banking services, remittance, credit, insurance, pension etc.

63. Answer: D

Explanation:

Ayushman Bharat -National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) is a centrally sponsored scheme under Ayushman Bharat Mission. Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS) are both subsumed under Ayushman Bharat.

64. Answer: B

Explanation:

RBI has four subsidiaries viz. Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, DICGC; National Housing Bank; Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Limited (BRBNMPL) and NABARD.

65. Answer: A

Explanation:

A Western Disturbance is an extratropical storm caused due to low pressure depressions in the Mediterranean region that brings sudden winter rain to the northwestern parts of the Indian subcontinent. It is a non-monsoonal precipitation pattern driven by the westerlies.

They are not local winds but are the global phenomenon and is embedded with westerlies.

66. Answer: A

67. Answer: C

Explanation:

Meenakshi Temple (also referred to as Meenakshi Amman or Meenakshi-Sundareshwara Temple) is a historic Hindu temple located on the southern bank of the Vaigai River in the temple city of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India.

68. Explanation: C

Explanation:

It's headquartered along along Sri Aurobindo Marg, opposite Safdarjung Airport, in New Delhi.

Other two statements are correct.

69. Answer: C

70. Answer: C

Explanation:

Repo or repurchase rate is the interest at which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends money to the banks. Facing shortfall of funds, the RBI lends money to the commercial banks. Repo rate is also used by monetary authorities to control inflation. On the contrary, reverse repo rate is the interest rate at which the central bank (RBI) borrows money from banks. It is a monetary policy instrument which can be used to control the money supply in the country.

71. Answer: D

Explanation:

India hosts 4 biodiversity hotspots: the Himalayas, the Western Ghats, the Indo-Burma region and the Sundaland (Includes Nicobar group of Islands). Western Ghats is also identified by UNESCO as a Natural World Heritage Site in India.

72. Answer: A

Explanation:

Article 1 elucidates India a "Union of States". These states are specified in the First Schedule of the constitution. First Schedule lists the States and Territories of India and also lists if any changes to borders of them. Articles 2, 3 and 4 enable parliament by law to admit a new state, increase, decrease the area of any state.

73. Answer: D

74. Answer: B

Explanation:

Banks Board Bureau (BBB) is an autonomous body of the Government of India tasked to improve the governance of Public Sector Banks, recommend selection of chiefs of government owned banks and financial institutions and to help banks in developing strategies and capital raising plans. The BBB was the part of Indradhanush Plan of government.

75. Answer: B

Explanation:

The neighbouring countries of India in decreasing order of border length are : Bangladesh-China-Pakistan-Nepal-Myanmar-Bhutan-Afghanistan.

76. Answer: C

Explanation:

Godavari does not flow into the Arabian Sea, it drains into the Bay of Bengal.

77. Answer: A

Explanation:

World Energy Outlook (WEO) and Southeast Asia Energy Outlook are published by International Energy Agency

78. Answer: C

Explanation:

It is a statutory body under the Ministry of Power, created under the provisions of the Energy Conservation Act 2001. It assists in developing policies and strategies with the primary objective of reducing the energy intensity of the Indian economy. It co-ordinates with designated consumers and designated agencies to identify and utilize the existing resources and infrastructure, in performing the functions assigned to it under the Energy Conservation Act.

79. Answer: A

Explanation:

The Environment Assembly meets biennially to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law.

80. Answer: C

Explanation:

WMO It is an intergovernmental organization which originated from the International Meteorological Organization. It provides world leadership and expertise in international cooperation in the delivery and use of high-quality, authoritative weather, climate, hydrological and related environmental services by its Members, for the improvement of the well-being of societies of all nations.

81. Answer : A

Explanation:

The Gini coefficient measures income inequality.

82. Answer: C

Explanation:

Aegean Sea is in news as the scientists have used EU satellite to spot Aegean sea litter.



83. Answer: B

Explanation:

Ilbert Bill controversy : In 1883, the Ilbert Bill was introduced which gave Indian judges the power to hear cases against European, by the then Viceroy Lord Ripon and Sir Courtenay Ilbert, the legal advisor to the Council of India. But there was a huge outcry against this bill from Britishers in India and in Britain. Arguments made against this bill displayed the deep racial prejudice the English had for Indians. This also exposed the true nature of British colonialism to the educated Indians.

84. Answer: A

Explanation:

The revolutionary organisation 'Abhinav Bharat Society' was founded in 1904 by VD Savarkar.

85. Answer: A

Explanation:

- Every year, April 22nd is celebrated as Earth Day. The Earth day is conducted in more than 192 countries around the world. The Earth Day is expected to display backing for conserving the environment.
- UNESCO Conference held in 1969 recommended selecting March 21st, 1970 as the first Earth Day.
- The United States chose to celebrate a separate Earth Day on April 22nd annually. Later this date became the internationally accepted Earth Day in 1990.
- There are also several communities that are backing environmental issues by celebrating Earth Week.
- The theme for Earth Day 2019 is 'Protect Our Species'. It aims to draw attention to the rapid extinction of species across the world, which is directly linked to human activity which causes climate change, deforestation and pollution.

86. Answer: B

Explanation:

The Central Information Commission (CIC) is the highest appeal body available to applicants seeking information under the RTI Act. The Chief Information Commissioner and the Information Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendations of a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM.

87. Answer: D

Explanation:

It is an ambitious gas pipeline project which aims to provide piped cooking (PNG) gas to residents of the eastern region of the country and CNG gas for the vehicles.

The project is being implemented by state-run gas utility GAIL.

88. Answer: C

Explanation:

The Chabahar port located on the Makran coast of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, next to the Gulf of Oman and at the mouth of Strait of Hormuz is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean. It is easily accessible from India's western coast and is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar port located at distance of around 80 km from Chabahar. The Chabahar port is being considered as a gateway to golden opportunities for trade by India, Iran, and Afghanistan with central Asian countries, besides ramping up trade among the three countries.

89. Answer: C

Explanation:

Ryotwari system of land revenue was instituted in the late 18th century by Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras in 1820.

90. Answer: D

Explanation:

There are only five living monotreme (egg-laying mammals) species: the duck-billed platypus and four species of echidna (also known as spiny anteaters). Echidnas are found only in Australia and New Guinea.

91. Answer: B

Explanation:

LIBOR is based on five currencies including the US dollar, the euro, the British pound, the Japanese yen, and the Swiss franc, and serves seven different maturities—overnight/spot next, one week, and one, two, three, six, and 12 months. The combination of five currencies and seven maturities leads to a total of 35 different LIBOR rates calculated and reported each business day. The most commonly quoted rate is the three-month U.S. dollar rate, usually referred to as the current LIBOR rate.

92. Answer: B

Explanation:

InSight, short for Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport, is a Mars lander designed to give the Red Planet its first thorough checkup since it formed 4.5 billion years ago. This mission is part of NASA's Discovery Program for highly focused science missions that ask critical questions in solar system science. It is the first outer space robotic explorer to study in-depth the "inner space" of Mars: its crust, mantle, and core.

93. Answer: C

Explanation:

Chang'e-4 is a Chinese lunar exploration mission that achieved the first soft landing on the far side of the Moon, in January 2019.

The tasks of the Chang'e-4 probe include:

- low-frequency radio astronomical observation
- surveying the terrain and landforms
- detecting the mineral composition and chemical composition of lunar rocks and soils
- measuring the neutron radiation and neutral atoms to study the environment on the far side of the moon.
- study cosmic rays
- observing Solar Corona: Observe the solar corona, investigate its radiation characteristics and mechanism, and to explore the evolution and transport of coronal mass ejections (CME) between the Sun and Earth.

94. Ans: C

Explanation:

Wangala — Meghalaya, Nagaland and Assam

- Also known as the 'Hundred Drums Festival', Wangala is celebrated by the people of the Garo tribe from Meghalaya, Nagaland and Assam. Various food items made from rice—a staple in this region—and rice beer (called chubitchi/chubok/chu) are consumed during the festivities.
- The date of the Wangala varies from village to village and it takes place between September and December.
- Typically, the celebrations are accompanied by dance and music, with people from across the village participating.

95. Ans: A

Explanation:

- India has five electricity grids – Northern, Eastern, North Eastern, Southern and Western.
- In 1991 North Eastern and Eastern grids were connected.
- In 2003 WR and ER-NER were interconnected.
- 2006 North and East grids were interconnected thereby 4 regional grids Northern, Eastern, Western and North Eastern grids are synchronously connected forming central grid operating at one frequency.
- 2013 Southern Region was connected to Central Grid in Synchronous mode with the commissioning of 765kV Raichur-Solapur Transmission line thereby achieving 'ONE NATION'-'ONE GRID'-'ONE FREQUENCY'.
- The union territories of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep are not connected to the National Grid. Both territories are archipelagos located far away from the mainland
- All the grids are being run by the state-owned Power Grid Corporation

96. Ans: A

Explanation:

- BepiColombo is an unmanned joint mission of the European Space Agency (ESA) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) to the planet Mercury on an Ariane 5 rocket.
- The spacecraft was named after Italian scientist Giuseppe "Bepi" Colombo
- The mission will perform a comprehensive study of Mercury, including its magnetic field, magnetosphere, interior structure and surface.

97. Ans: c

Explanation:

Gram negative vs Gram positive bacteria – what's the difference?

- There are two major classes of bacteria, known as Gram positive and Gram negative. They take their names from how they respond to the Gram staining test, which in turn was named after Danish scientist Hans Christian Gram, who developed the technique.
- A bacterium is known to be Gram negative or Gram positive based on its reaction to the test – Gram positive bacteria stain purple, and Gram negative do not.
- Gram negative bacteria are generally considered the more difficult to treat. They include such nasties as E. coli, Salmonella, Pseudomonas, and the Gonococcus bacteria – responsible for the sexually transmitted infection gonorrhoea.
- Antibiotics have a tough time dealing with Gram negative bacteria because of their additional outer membrane, which prevents drugs from getting inside.

98. Answer C

- This thermometer has been developed using graphene quantum dots.
- The device can find widespread applications in cryogenic temperature sensing. Since the sensor has high sensitivity and ability to measure minute changes in temperature, it will be useful in the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare to measure the incubation temperature of biological cells and molecules and the automobile industry to measure the ignition temperature within the engine.

99. Answer D

- The 'Bharati' script is a unified script currently developed for nine Indian languages.
- The scripts that have been integrated include Devnagari, Bengali, Gurmukhi, Gujarati, Oriya, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil.

100. Answer A

The Palk Strait is the geographical divide that separates Sri Lanka from India.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. "Rigidity of the caste system, illiteracy and unawareness about the rights, Khap Panchayats, danger of losing prestige and status in society are the major causes which are leading to Honour Killing in India". In the context of the above statement analyse the incidents of Honour Killing in India. What are the existing provisions against honour killing and what can be the way forward in eradicating such malady from the society?
2. Multiple drives for development of backward areas have resulted in isolating the tribal population who face multiple displacements. It is tragic that 'New India' chooses to attack Adivasis and forest-dwellers instead of those destroying its ecology. Comment
3. Analyse the causes of forest fires, various approaches to fight the forest fires and the measures to mitigate them.
4. Critically analyse the key provisions of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 and discuss the way forward.
5. There have been many instances of human rights violations under AFSPA. Can a democratic state like India afford to have a regressive law like AFSPA? Critically examine.
6. Explain why the cyclones that emerge in the Arabian Sea are less destructive as compared to those which originate in the Bay of Bengal. Give a brief note on the conditions necessary for the formation of cyclones.
7. Bringing the Supreme Court under the purview of RTI would affect the independence of Judiciary. Critically comment.
8. Algeria shows the forces of the Arab Spring are still alive. Elucidate.
9. Are electoral bonds posing a threat to democracy? Critically comment.
10. What is the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)? Is the MCC in its present form efficient enough to ensure Free and Fair Elections in India? Suggest reforms needed.
11. The Indian Civil Aviation sector has come under considerable scrutiny. Examine the problems that plague this sector and discuss viable solutions.
12. The issue concerning Electoral bonds is recently in the news. To what extent have electoral bonds brought financial transparency into the electoral process? Examine.
13. Forest Fires are a major threat to flora and fauna along with the vital ecosystems that sustain it. Justify.
14. The rising tensions between the U.S. and Iran have major geopolitical implications. Examine this with a focus on India.
15. Explain the Constitutional procedure for selection of a successor in case of the demise of a sitting chief minister of a state.
16. India had posted the highest growth in patent applications in 2018. In the backdrop of this news, analyse why a robust IPR policy is imperative for India's growth and development.
17. Business-politician nexus has undergone a major transformation. Compare this in reference to the pre and post – LPG era and also comment on its implication to democracy.
18. "Climate change is considered as a blessing in disguise". Illustrate with examples.
19. NSA and AFSPA are draconian laws not suitable for a democratic country like India. Critically comment.
20. The Financial Act of 2017 interferes with the doctrine of separation of powers. Analyse.
21. What is Bombogenesis? What are the conditions required for the formation of Bomb Cyclone?
22. "Fake news is termed as yellow journalism. With the advent of new age digital and social media, fake news has pervaded all spheres of life." In the context of the above statement examine the legal and technical hurdles in regulating the fake news. Also, comment on how fake news affects conduction of free and fair elections.

23. Jallianwala Bagh massacre was one of the worst acts of violence in the history of the world. Comment. What was the main objective of General Dyer behind the Jallianwala Bagh massacre?
24. BRI is not an avenue to promote common development to build global connectivity but a disguised neo-colonialist attempt at debt trap. Critically analyse.
25. Monetary policy must touch the real economy, spur investments, and maintain monetary and financial stability. Examine.
26. The controversy surrounding the acquisition of the Rafael fighter jets has raised a question mark on the probity of defence procurement. Examine.
27. "Economic reservations must exist only in instances of persistent, intergenerational poverty". Critically examine the statement in the light of 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act.
28. In India, 65% of health expenditure is out-of-pocket. Write a brief not on India's Health care challenges and solutions. What are the steps taken by the government to ensure "Health for All"
29. Standards of public life and the norms of electoral conduct have deteriorated over the years and the benchmarks have steadily gone down. What are the powers of the Election Commission in the implementation of Model Code of Conduct? Suggest measures to strictly check and deter the violation of MCC.
30. Strength, peace and security are considered to be the pillars of international relations. Elucidate.
31. What are 'Western Disturbances'? How do they influence India's weather?
32. On the one hand, people are dying of rain and thunderstorms in India. On the other hand, people are dying due to drought in rural India. Critically analyse.
33. It is a well-known fact that a person, who is not convicted and only under trial, cannot cast his vote from jail or from his detention place but he can very well contest election. Police custody for any accused robs the aggrieved from his valuable right to vote. Critically comment.
34. What do you understand by the phenomenon of temperature inversion? How does it affect the weather and the habitants of a place?
35. What is compulsory voting? Should India implement it? Critically examine.
36. Recently, the Government of India has finalized the first draft of the comprehensive amendments to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA). Critically examine the features of the draft bill Indian Forest Act, 2019.
37. Coffee production in India has seen a consistent decline. What are the reasons? What steps have been taken by the government to increase production?
38. India's pollution problem is much bigger than often perceived. While the government data shows that six crore households have received a connection through the Ujjwala scheme, people still prefer wood fuel. What are the reasons? Explain the harmful effects of indoor pollution.
40. Along with getting a go ahead from the Censorship Board, a film must also satisfy all kinds of religious fringe elements. It is believed that religion has taken over all the aspects of life. Critically comment.
41. Why has the adoption of solar thermal been tepid relative to its potential even though the use of solar heat in industries is not uncommon? Bring out the advantages of Solar Thermal over Solar photovoltaic.
42. The Srilankan Crisis will have spill over effects on India. What should India do to insulate itself from radicalism spilling over to its territories? Suggest Measures.
43. With USA expecting countries to follow its directives, warning countries that it will lead to sanctions if trade continues, is it a violation of Sovereign principle? What are various concerns arising as a result of this move. Discuss its implications on India.

44. Bilkis Bano fight for justice, dignity and equality keeps alive the idea of Citizenship enshrined in the Constitution. Comment on the role of the Supreme Court and the government in awarding justice to victims of a riot or catastrophe.
45. The suspension of the J&K LoC trade is a regressive step and a lost opportunity. Critically examine.
46. Explain the significance of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Also illustrate with examples how local self-governments can ensure sustaining nutrition initiatives.
47. Fighting international terrorism requires Global Counter-Terrorism Cooperation. What steps should the world initiate to prevent the growing menace of Terrorism?
48. The office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) has come under controversy recently. Examine the need to restore faith in the third pillar of democracy. What are some of the reformatory steps that can be taken towards ensuring probity in the higher offices of the judiciary.
49. The issue concerning closing of trade at the LoC (Line of Control) has sparked criticisms from a section of people. To what extent would this move serve as a means towards curbing terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir? Discuss.
50. Is rationality the enemy of religion? Which among the two would be a healthier guide for the promotion of morality in a society?
51. China signals willingness to address criticism of Belt and Road Initiative. India should take a fresh look at the initiative and modulate its approach. Critically comment.
52. Antimicrobial resistance is one of the greatest threats we face as a global community. Explain the response needed to curb its rise and protect a century of progress in health.
53. India will need pragmatism, diplomatic skill in shaping new rules for regulation of outer space. What are the issues that demand India's attention? Elucidate.
54. Century old system of prisons in India calls for urgent reforms. Discuss the need for prison reforms in India.
55. Women in India need equal access to opportunities to gain a measure of economic independence, without which it is hard to imagine independence on other fronts. Elucidate
56. Women are considered second class citizens in almost all religious practices, rituals, and customs. There is an underlying need to dismantle gender stereotypes within a religious framework and discuss various issues that affect the life of women. Comment in the light of issue concerning entry of women into places of worship such as temples, mosques, etc.
57. Explain conflict of interest. Elaborate with respect to lateral entry into Civil Services.
58. The absence of efficient governance by district councils in Karbi-Anglong district has resulted in continuation of insurgency in Assam. Elucidate.
59. What are the principles of Natural Justice? Explain in the light of recent controversies surrounding the Supreme Court.
60. India is in urgent need to formulate a 'Counter Proxy War Doctrine' that is multi-pronged and all-encompassing against Pakistan. Explain.
61. If independence of the judiciary means unquestioned power without accountability, then that power needs to be counterbalanced by other state organs or institutions apart from the judges themselves. How can we ensure transparency and accountability of Sitting Judges in the apex court?

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