

Monthly Current Affairs

JANUARY-2019

CONTENT

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
1	Polity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10% quota for economically weaker sections• Ad Library• Collegium controversy• Democracy Index• Freedom of Literature Bill, 2018• Judicial Evasion (JE)• MPs' panel proposes legal status for SSC• Northeast Autonomous Councils• National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 Launched• Oral Mentioning• Panel concerned at CBI vacancies• Sedition and politics• Let the grassroots breathe• Checks and balances- Center state relationship• Municipal Model is broken• Fabrication and falsification – Data manipulation in the MGNREGA• Job on compassionate grounds not a right: SC• Report of the Committee on section 126 of the representation of the people act, 1951 submitted to the commission	7
2	ECONOMY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aber• Asia Competitiveness Institute's (ACI) EDB index• Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank• Atal Setu• Baltic Dry Index• Beveridge curve/ UV curve• Byorung Bridge• Carnot Prize• CPRI Regional Testing Laboratory at Nashik• Credit Guarantee Fund for Startups• Dikko Bridge• DIPPP rechristened to include internal trade• E commerce Rules• GAFA tax• GDP Debate• Global Commission on Future of Work• Indus Food 2019• Inflation targeting	20

- Inter-State Disparities
- Joint Supply
- Kadaknath chicken/ Kali Masi - Madhya Pradesh
- Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA)
- National Conclave on Technical Textiles at Mumbai
- National Workshop on Agri Export Policy
- Nilekani to head RBI panel on digital payments
- NK Singh (FRBM Review) Committee
- Panda bonds
- Partnership Summit
- Petrotech
- Recombinant Elisa Kits
- Repugnant market
- Survey on Retail Payment Habits of Individuals (SRPHi)
- Swap Ration
- The Future of Rail Report
- Tokenization- Customers cannot be charged for availing service says RBI
- Transport Subsidy Scheme
- Trinitea
- UK Sinha Committee
- Universal Basic Income
- Start-up challenges
- Justice delayed is markets stymied
- Vijay Mallya becomes first person to be declared 'fugitive economic offender'
- Panel pulls up govt. for diverting coal cess
- Govt. plans technology centres for MSMEs
- Shape of the slowdown (Chinese Economy Slowdown)
- RBI eases norms for external commercial borrowing
- Pune-Secunderabad Shatabdi is India's cleanest train
- E-comm talks: India must stand firm
- Removing the roots of farmers' distress – On agrarian distress
- Shot in the arm (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code)

3	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	44
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear Installations and Facilities• American pullout from Afghanistan• Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA)• Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT)• Hard Power Imperative• Henley Passport Index• Huawei's CFO is arrested in Canada for 'violating U.S. sanctions on Iran'• India-South Africa relations• Kuril Islands• Manbij• Panj Tirath• Israel and Saudi Arabia increasing intimacy• India- Norway Relations• How India's Republic Day Chief Guest is chosen?• Powering South Asian integration (India- South Asia)• Still nothing to show for (The Economic Crisis in Pakistan)• A failed coup in Venezuela (Crisis in Venezuela)	
4	SOCIAL ISSUES	60
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anti-lynching law by Manipur• Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018• Jiban Sampark• Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982• Khonds/Kondh/Kui• Khushi Scheme• Menstrual Hygiene for Adolescent girls Schemes• Narikuravas (Jackal Catchers)• Web- Wonder Women Campaign• Left out, abused (Neglect of child care institutions)• Dancing around the Supreme Court – on ban imposed by the Maharashtra government on dance performances in bars• Capable even if disabled (Disability Rights)	
5	SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	68
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Artificial Intelligence- India ranks third• Chang'e-4 lunar probe• DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018• Gene-Editing• Indian Science Congress• Microsat-R and Kamalsat• Sino-Indian Digital Collaboration Plaza (SIDCOP)• UNNATI (UNISpace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training by ISRO)	

6	SECURITY AND DEFENSE	74
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrow 3 Interceptor• Bodo Accord• Clause 6 of Assam Accord• Defence India Startup Challenge• Legacy Person• Sea Vigil Exercise• Suresh Kait Committee by MHA• 1.8 people from India have joined Al Qaeda wing: NIA	
7	ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY	78
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Africa Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development• Biological Immortality• Cinereous Vulture• Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)• Galapagos Island bans noisy fireworks• Golden Langur/Trachypithecus geei• Green – Ag• Great Indian Bustard• International Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation• Mandal Dam project• National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)• Rag Rag Mein Ganga• Rat-Hole Mining – Institutional Flaws• Renuka Multipurpose Dam Project• SALSA (Subglacial Antarctic Lakes Scientific Access)• Sarus Crane• Seno Ballena Fjord• Starling• Sipahijola Wildlife Sanctuary• Turtle Excluder Device• Wayanad sanctuary• Yamuna River Pollution• Parliamentary committee irked by States' insensitivity to Western Ghats• Exotic trees eating up Western Ghat's grasslands• Survey spots 3 new bird visitors• NITI Aayog's "Strategy for New India@75"• 9th International Conference on micro irrigation to be held at Aurangabad• 'Plastic waste imports to India go up'• Half done (Plastic Waste Management)• Protest against proposed bird sanctuary in Manipur• Jumbos to patrol Odisha's Satkosia Tiger Reserve• Cow urine may be adding to global warming	

8	HEALTH ISSUES	92
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)• Lymphatic Filariasis/ Elephantiasis• Malaria Control• National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases (NPTRD)• Plain Tobacco Packaging• Tobacco companies targeting children: Study• SUGAM• Swine Flu• Yellow Fever Vaccine• Zearalenone• Midday meal controversy in Karnataka• Mobile Apps Launched Ministry Of Health And Family Welfare• The lowdown on blood transfusions• HC stays ban on online sale of drugs• Non-communicable diseases top killers: WHO• Think differently about healthcare	
9	EDUCATION	102
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 70-point grading index• App for Odia-medium school students• Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018• Jan Shikshan Sansthan• Government announces hike in research fellowship	
10	ART AND CULTURE	104
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asurgarh Fort• Chowmahalla Palace• Indian Panorama Film Festival• Katora Houz• Lakhon Khol• Lothal- India's oldest port cities• Maghi• Monuments of National Importance• National Museum of Indian Cinema• Nati (dance)• Petroglyph• Phuti Masjid• Qasr al-Farid tomb (The Lonely Castle)	
11	DISASTER MANAGEMENT	108
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cyclone Pabuk• Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar	

12	GOVERNANCE	109
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill 2018• Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)• DTH Regulations	
12	GEOGRAPHY	112
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delhi Rains• Kaveri Crater• Pepper Cultivation• Polar Vortex- Arctic Chill• Shetrunji River• Yalu River/Amrok River/ Amnok River• What could happen to earth if its poles flipped?• Millions flock to Sagar Island in Bengal for Makar Sankranti	
13	HISTORY	115
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pietermaritzburg Incident• National Salt Satyagraha Memorial in Dandi	
14	MISCELLANEOUS	116
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Atang Ane• Bharat Ratna• Global Misperceptions Index• Labelling theory• M2M/ IoT Conference• National conference on "Prison Design"• Paint Your Toilet• Roshni App• Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM)• Shehri Samridhi Utsav• Shishir Saras• Rural housing achieves only 66% target• Unique variety of pumpkin developed• Private FM channels permitted to carry all India radio news	
15	PRACTICE QUESTIONS	120
16	ANSWER KEY	133
17	MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS	135

POLITY

1. 10% quota for economically weaker sections

Context:

- The Lok Sabha passed a landmark bill providing 10 per cent reservation in government jobs and educational institutions to "economically weaker" sections in the General category.

Context:

- A nine-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court had in the Indira Sawhney case capped the reservation at 50%.
 - * It had struck down a provision that earmarked 10% for the economically backward on the ground that economic criteria cannot be the sole basis to determine backwardness.
- The Constitution provides only for reservation based on social and educational backwardness, such additional quota would need legislative action, including Constitutional amendments.
- Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution will have to be amended for implementation of the decision

124th Constitution Amendment Bill

- It will provide 10% reservation to economically backward sections in the general category
- The Bill will also cover those from the Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and other minority communities.
- The quota will be over and above the existing 50% reservation to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBC).
- Those who have an annual salary of less than ₹8 lakh per year and possess less than 5 acres of land will be able to avail reservation in educational institutions and jobs.
- The quota will be available to only those economically backward poor people not availing the benefit of reservation as of now, who have a residential house below 1,000 square feet, a residential plot below 100 square yards in a notified municipality, residential plot below 200 square yards in non-notified municipality area.

Ratification

- This bill will have to be passed by both Houses of Parliament by a special majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting, which should not be less than one-half of the total strength of the House.

Concerns

- If the Supreme Court indeed agrees to lift the 50% cap, all States of India can extend the quantum of reservation and "upper castes" will stand to lose in State services and merit will be the casualty.

- If the Supreme Court rejects the idea of breaching the 50% cap, Economically Weaker Section (EWS) quotas can be provided only by eating into the SC, ST and OBC quota pie, which will have social and political implications.

It violates Equality Principle

- There have been issues where the quotas were increased by State governments exceeding the 50% limit thereby offending the equality norm.
- In Nagaraj (2006), a Constitution Bench ruled that equality is part of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- It said the 50% ceiling, among other things, was a constitutional requirement without which the structure of equality of opportunity would collapse. There has been a string of judgments against reservations that breach the 50% limit.

Lack of data on representation

- Another question is whether reservations can go to a section that is already adequately represented in public employment.
- It is not clear if the government has quantifiable data to show that people from lower income groups are under-represented in its service.
- Reservations have been traditionally provided to undo historical injustice and social exclusion suffered over a period of time, and the question is whether they should be extended to those with social and educational capital solely on the basis of what they earn.

It includes everyone

- One of the criteria — the income threshold of ₹8 lakh per annum — has been mentioned.
- The National Sample Survey (NSS) of 2011-12 shows that the annual per capita expenditure for 99% of households falls under this threshold, even when we take inflation into account.
- Similarly, as per the India Human Development Survey (IHDS), the annual household incomes of 98% of households are less than ₹8 lakh.
- Even if we apply all the other criteria for exclusion (e.g. amount of land owned and size of home), the Bill would still cover over 95% of the households. So, who are we excluding? Almost no one.

Lack of due deliberation

- Parliament ended the penultimate session of this Lok Sabha with both Houses passing the Constitution (124th Amendment) Bill, 2019, which illustrates the collective failure of parliamentarians to review the government's proposals and hold it to account.

Process

- The rules of procedure of the Lok Sabha require every Bill to be circulated at least two days ahead of introduction. The debate started from just a few hours MPs had been given a copy. The debate ended on the very same day.
 - * This is to give time for MPs to read the Bill and discuss it (or make objections) when the vote on the motion to introduce the Bill is taken up. This was not followed.
- The usual practice is to refer Bills to the respective standing committee of Parliament.
 - * This step allows MPs to solicit public feedback and interact with experts before forming their recommendations.
 - * In the case of this Constitution Amendment — clearly one with far-reaching implications — this scrutiny mechanism was bypassed.
- The Bill was not circulated ahead of being introduced, it was not examined by a committee, there was hardly any time between its introduction and final discussion. Barring a few small parties, none of the larger Opposition parties asked for the Bill to be carefully considered by a parliamentary committee

British contrast

- Contrast this with the incidents in the British Parliament when the Speaker ensured parliamentary supremacy over the government.
- A member of the ruling Conservative Party wanted to move an amendment to set a deadline for the Prime Minister to put forward new plans if she loses the Brexit vote next week.
- When the government objected that such amendments to set the business of the government in the House can be moved only by a Minister, the Speaker differed. He said that every member had a right to move an amendment. The motion was won by 308 votes to 297.

This case highlights three important ways in which the British Parliament works better than ours

- First, the absence of an anti-defection law, so that each MP can vote her conscience.
- Second, it is known exactly how each MP voted.
 - * In India, most votes (other than Constitution Amendments that need a two-thirds majority to pass) are through voice votes — just 7% of other Bills had a recorded vote over the last 10 years.
- Third, the Speaker insisted on the supremacy of Parliament, and allowed a motion against the wishes of the government.
 - * Unlike in India, the independence of the Speaker is secured in the U.K. as no party contests against the Speaker in the next general election.

Our Parliament often falls short of these goals due to some structural reasons.

- These include the anti-defection law (that restrains MPs from voting according to their conscience),
- Lack of recorded voting as a norm (which reduces the accountability of the MP as voters don't know which way they voted on each issue),
- Party affiliation of the Speaker (making her dependent on the party leadership for re-election prospects),
- Frequent bypassing of committees (just 25% of Bills have been referred to committees in this Lok Sabha),
- Insufficient time and research support to examine Bills, and the lack of a calendar (Parliament is held at the convenience of the government).

Alternative Strategies

- One strategy may be to try and spread the benefits of reservations as widely as possible within the existing framework and ensure that individuals use their reserved category status only once in their lifetime.
 - * This would require that anyone using reservations to obtain a benefit such as college admission must register his/her Aadhaar number and she would be ineligible to use reservations for another benefit (e.g. a job) in the future.
 - * This would require no changes to the basic framework but spread the benefits more broadly within the reserved category allowing a larger number of families to seek upward mobility.
- A second strategy might be to recognise that future economic growth in India is going to come from the private sector and entrepreneurship. In order to ensure that all Indians, regardless of caste, class and religion, are able to partake in economic growth, we must focus on basic skills.
 - * We have focused on admission to prestigious colleges and government jobs, but little attention is directed to social inequality in the quality of elementary schooling.

2. Ad LibraryContext

- In an update released by Facebook it has said it would tighten rules for political ads in countries such as India where elections are scheduled in the first half of the year, building on transparency efforts already under way in the United States, Britain and Brazil

Background

Facebook since 2016 has become a means for politicians and their adversaries to distribute fake news and other propaganda.

- Facebook was forced to admit that Cambridge Analytica, a political firm working for Donald Trump in 2016, had hijacked the data of tens of millions of its users.

- Some critics of the Brexit referendum accuse Cambridge Analytica of having used that data to swing voters towards the “Leave” vote.

Details

- Facebook has taken this move to prevent foreign interference and giving people more information about the ads they see across our platforms.
- In the U.S., Britain and Brazil, political advertisers must confirm their identity and location before they can run Facebook ads, which are also housed in a public, searchable library for up to seven years.

3. Collegium controversy

Introduction

- Independent judiciary is the third pillar in India’s constitutional framework, counterbalancing the legislature and the executive.
- In the Constituent Assembly debates that preceded the creation of the SC, Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking on higher judicial appointments, said that the judges selected should be of the “highest integrity” and be persons “who can stand up against the executive government and whoever might come in their way”.

Lack of Transparency in Judicial Appointments

- The process for the appointment of judges lies at the heart of an independent judiciary. Over the years, this process has manifested itself in the questionable form of the Collegium of judges, which decides on appointments to both the SC and the high courts.
- Here are the facts of the ongoing controversy: the collegium decides on names for two positions in the court in December, but the final recommendation to the law ministry is not made
- In January, the collegium meets again, but this time discusses fresh names. The consultations are completed immediately after and two fresh names are recommended.
- The Collegium process has once again shown that it is opaque, with its members working as if in a cabal. More problematically, the Collegium is not accountable to any other authority.
- Its present decision to appoint Justice Dinesh Maheshwari and Justice Sanjiv Khanna, instead of two judges whose names had been considered earlier is especially concerning.
 - * Justice Maheshwari was earlier rejected by the Collegium in its December 2018 meeting.
 - * Justice Khanna has been selected over his three senior colleagues, Justices Pradeep Nandrajog, Gita Mittal and S Ravindra Bhat.

Some answered Questions

- How can the Judges change the names of appointee who were selected earlier by arbitrarily revoking a decision made in December?

- When the collegium met again in January, its composition had changed following the retirement of Justice Madan B. Lokur. It was then decided that it would be “appropriate” to have a fresh look at the matter, as well as the “additional material”.
- Can the retirement of one judge be a ground to withdraw a considered decision, even if some consultations were incomplete?
- The rationale for the names of Rajasthan High Court Chief Justice Pradeep Nandrajog and Delhi High Court Chief Justice Rajendra Menon being left out is the claim that new material had surfaced. However, it is not clear what the material is and how it affected their suitability.
- The SC’s exhortations that seniority should be deviated from only if there are “cogent reasons” to do so seem to have been ignored; at least, no reasons — cogent or otherwise — have been offered in this surprising decision.

Issues raised

- Sons and nephews of previous judges or senior lawyers tend to be popular choices for judicial roles.
- With its ad hoc informal consultations with other judges, which do not significantly investigate criteria such as work, standing, integrity and so on, the Collegium remains outside the sphere of legitimate checks and balances.
- “The decision of 10th January, 2019, will lead to humiliation and demoralization of such judges and also of several other deserving senior judges and Chief Justices of High Courts,” the BCI said, asking the Collegium to recall its decision.
- The retired Delhi High Court judge, Kailash Gambhir, too wrote to President Ram Nath Kovind, saying the Collegium’s decision cast aspersions on the “intellect, merit and integrity” of the 32 senior judges, including many Chief Justices of the High Courts.

The decision to create a Collegium in the first place was disastrous in more ways than one.

- H M Seervai, for example, wrote that “never has a majority judgment of the Supreme Court reached a lower level of judicial incompetence”.
- Justice Krishna Iyer described this judgment as “an egregious fraud on the Constitution”.
- Lord Cooke of Thorndon also criticised this judgment in an essay that borrowed its title from Alexander Pope’s famous words, “fools rush in where angels fear to tread”.

Conclusion

- As a democracy, it seems anomalous that we continue to have a judiciary whose essence is determined by a process that is evidently undemocratic.

- That reforms in the existing selection process are urgently needed is stating the obvious.
- The lack of a written manual for functioning, the absence of selection criteria, the arbitrary reversal of decisions already taken, the selective publication of records of meetings — all of these point to the fact that the Collegium is not only as opaque as it was, it may perhaps have become worse.
- This is a time to revisit the Collegium issue, either through a Presidential reference to the Supreme Court, or a constitutional amendment with appropriate changes in the original NJAC law.

4. **Democracy Index**

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

Ranking

- India is ranked at 41 in 2018.
- It is still classified as a 'flawed democracy' according to the index. India achieved a score of 7.23 on the index to maintain its position – the same it did in 2017. This is the lowest ever score attributed to India in the index ever since its publication.
 - * The report defines a flawed democracy as nations that "have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation."
- India ranks below the US (ranked 25th in the index) and other so called 'flawed democracies' like Italy, France, Botswana and South Africa.
- On expected lines, Scandinavian nations hogged were perched on top of the democracy pyramid. Norway was the world's most perfect democracy followed by Iceland and Sweden.

5. **Freedom of Literature Bill, 2018**

Context

- Parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor has introduced the Freedom of Literature Bill in the Lok Sabha with the aim of increasing literary freedom in the country

- The bill seeks to remove "outdated provisions which are not congruent with the spirit of democracy, such as the anti-blasphemy and obscenity laws".

Background

In recent times, several attempts to get books withdrawn, pulped or sanitized of offending content have achieved full or partial success in India.

- Wendy Doniger's *The Hindus: An Alternative History* was withdrawn from circulation, and
- A.K. Ramanujan's essay 'Three Hundred Ramayanas' was dropped from a Delhi University syllabus.
- Tamil writer Perumal Murugan's *Madhorubagan* (One Part Woman) was withdrawn by the author under mob pressure but resurrected by a Madras High Court verdict.
- Public order, national unity and social or religious harmony are the principles commonly invoked against the practice of literary freedom.

Section 295A and 298 IPC

- 295A. Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs
- 298. Uttering, words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person
- The Bill seeks the omission of Section 295A and 298 IPC, which punish acts done to outrage or wound religious feelings
 - * The provision is worded in wide and vague terms. The provisions are mostly used to suppress alternate views expressed by writers, thinkers and scholars.

Section 67 of the IT Act

- Punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form.
 - * It says, "Whoever publishes or transmits or causes to be published or transmitted in the electronic form, any material which is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or tends to deprave and corrupt persons shall be punished."
- Between 2002 and 2015, Section 67 was the highest used Section in the IT Act after Section 66.
- 2008 to 2015, the number of cases filed under Section 67 grew steadily from 105 to 749
- There have been cases where images of politician's look-alike are superimposed with props with the help of Snapchat's 'dog filter'. This has been considered 'obscene' under Section 67.
 - * Definition of the word 'obscenity' is vague.
 - * Section 67 of the IT Act and its offline version – IPC Section 292 – on the same ground that the words used to define the sections are subjective and unclear, which is why they are being misused for indiscriminate arrests.

Other sections

- Section 293 IPC, Sale, etc., of obscene objects to young person.—Whoever sells, lets to hire, distributes, exhibits or circulates to any person under the age of twenty years
 - * It is sought to be amended to make such distribution an offence only if it is targeted at children below the age of 18 years.
 - * The Bill further seeks to amend the provisions dealing with obscenity. Section 292, which punishes publication of obscene material, is sought to be omitted wholly
- The Bill also amends Sections 95 and 96 of the CrPC, which enables Government to ban and forfeit books. The State Government may, by notification, stating the grounds of its opinion, declare every copy of the issue of the newspaper containing such matter, and every copy of such book or other document to be forfeited.
 - * A new procedure is proposed to be put in place, whereby it is the burden of the Government to get the ban order ratified by the High Court within
- It favors the scrapping of the provision in the Customs Act to ban the import of books, but makes a public order exception.
- The Bill seeks to amend the provisions in the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, Customs Act and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act which affect literary and artistic freedom

Conclusion

- This is a welcome Step by Shashi Tharoor, a step towards removing or diluting penal provisions that inhibit literary freedom.

6. Judicial Evasion (JE)What is JE?

- It is an act of courts to avoid deciding a thorny and time-sensitive question which involves interpretation of law or giving judgment on a timely basis.
- Its very refusal to decide is, effectively, a decision in favor of the government, because it is the government that benefits from the status quo being maintained.
- Example: In the Aadhaar challenge, the case was finally heard six years after it was filed, effectively allowing the government to present a fait accompli to the court.

Background

- The Alok Verma Case — or “CBI vs CBI”, as it has come to be popularly known — reveals some of the pathologies that have plagued the Supreme Court’s conduct in recent high-profile cases.
- Supreme Court headed by the Chief Justice of India, was confronted with a straightforward legal question: whether the decision taken by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and the Central government to divest Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Director Alok Verma of his powers and functions was legally valid.
- The question was a straightforward one, because it required the court to interpret three legal instruments: the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act (that brought the CBI into existence), the CVC Act, and the Supreme Court’s own prior judgment in Vineet Narain.

SC Judgment

- In the Alok Verma case, the Supreme Court finally returned a clear finding that the CVC and the Central government had acted outside their jurisdiction in divesting Mr. Verma.
- However, the court then went on to also hold that the correct authority — the high-powered committee — would have to consider the allegations against him, and decide on the case within a week.
- In the meantime, Mr. Verma was restrained from taking “any major policy decisions”.

Dodging by SC

- What exactly is a “major policy decision”? What did the court mean when it said that Mr. Verma’s role would be “confined only to the exercise of the ongoing routine functions without any fresh initiative”?
- None of these is a legal term, and the lack of clarity only raises the spectre of fresh litigation, thus further hamstringing Mr. Verma

Conclusion

- During the Constituent Assembly debates, there was a proposal that all cases involving fundamental rights be decided within a month.
- The fear was that the more time the court took, the more the government would benefit from the status quo. Recent events have confirmed this fear.
- In high stakes cases, time-sensitive cases, the court must ensure two things: that the judgment is timely, and that the judgment is clear.
- The Alok Verma case demonstrates how, when the court fails to do so, it abdicates its role as the sentinel on the qui vive, and allows the government to get away with abuse of law.

7. MPs panel proposes legal status for SSC

Context

- The A Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has recommended that the Centre accord statutory status to the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), one of the largest recruitment agencies in the country.

SSC

- The Staff Selection Commission is an attached office of the Department of Personnel and Training
- The Staff Selection Commission has its Headquarter at New Delhi.
- It comprises of Chairman, two Members and a Secretary-cum-Controller of Examinations who are appointed on such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government from time to time.
- The Estimates Committee of the Parliament, in its 47th Report (1967-68), recommended the setting up of a Service Selection Commission for conducting examinations for recruitment to lower categories of posts.
- The Government of India, in the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms vide its Resolution constituted a Commission called the Subordinate Services Commission which has subsequently been re-designated as Staff Selection Commission effective from 1977

Functions

- They make recruitment to Group "C" (non-technical) posts in the various Ministries/Departments of the Govt. of India and in Subordinate Offices.
- The functions of the Staff Selection Commission have been enlarged from time to time and now it carries out the recruitment also to all Group "B" posts

What does the MP Panel say?

- The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and all State Public Service Commission's either have constitutional or legal status.
- The SSC was created to ease the burden of the UPSC by taking over the recruitment for posts below the Group 'A' level.
- It performs similar functions on a much larger scale, but does not enjoy statutory status
 - * Job applicants have increased from 9.94 lakh candidates in 2008-09 to over 2 crore in 2016-17.
- Being an "attached body" has to depend entirely on the government for all its needs, with no autonomy.

Recommendation

- According statutory status to the SSC would contribute to

- * greater functional autonomy,
- * Faster decision-making and efficiency in the overall performance and delivery of results by the SSC in the recruitment process.

- An expert group constituted by the government in 2014, for reviewing the examination system in the SSC, had recommended according statutory status to the Commission

8. Northeast Autonomous Councils

Context

- The Union Cabinet approved a constitutional amendment to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 autonomous councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeast.

Autonomous District Council

- As per the Sixth Schedule, the four states viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram contain the Tribal Areas which are technically different from the Scheduled Areas.
- Though these areas fall within the executive authority of the state, provision has been made for the creation of the District Councils and regional councils for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers.
- Each district is an autonomous district and Governor can modify / divide the boundaries of the said Tribal areas by notification. Currently, there are ten such Councils in the region as listed below

Details of the proposed amendment

- The amendment would impact a population of about 1 crore tribals living in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram
- The Finance Commission would be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to the councils, the government said in an official statement. Till now, the autonomous councils have depended on grants from Central Ministries and the State governments for specific projects.
- As per the proposed amendment, at least one third of the seats would be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
- The amendment also provides for transfer of additional 30 subjects, including the departments of Public Works, Forests, Public Health Engineering, Health and Family Welfare, Urban Development and Food and Civil Supply to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council in Assam.
- The proposed amendments provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grass-roots level. The State Election Commissions would hold elections to the autonomous councils, village and municipal councils in the areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura

9. NATIONAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT FESTIVAL 2019 LAUNCHED

Context:

- Minister of State (I/C) for Youth Affairs and Sports launched the National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 at New Delhi, thereby beginning the celebration of the National Youth Day 2019.

THEME

- National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 is organised on the theme of "Be The Voice of New India" and "Find solutions and contribute to policy".

DETAILS:

- Youth in the age bracket of 18-25 years are invited to participate in the District Youth Parliaments. This is done in order to hear the voice of youth in this age bracket who are allowed to vote but cannot contest in elections.
- The National Youth Parliament Festival will also encourage the youth to engage with public issues, understand the common man's point of view, form their opinion and express these in an articulate manner.
- Relevant and effective voices on the vision of New India would be captured and documented to make these available to policy makers and implementers to take it forward.
- The National Youth Parliament Festival 2019 will be conducted at three levels:
 - * District Youth Parliament (DYP) at the district level.
 - * State Youth Parliament (SYP) at the State Level.
 - * National Youth Parliament (NYP) at the National Level
- The best three speakers at the National Youth Parliament will be awarded Rs. 2 Lakhs, Rs. 1.50 Lakhs and Rs. 1 Lakh respectively by the Prime Minister.

10. Oral Mentioning

Background

- CJI is the master of the roster. Cases filed in the Supreme Court generally take up to seven days before being listed for hearing.
- Lawyers or litigants seeking urgent hearing or relief, mention their petitions before the CJI for urgent listing.

What is it?

- It is a convention by which lawyers short-circuit the long-winded filing procedures and make a direct appeal to the CJI, who is the court's administrative head and master of roster, for early hearing.

- The CJI takes a call on the spot, after glancing through the case papers, whether the case deserves to be heard out-of-turn. Hearing a case out-of-turn would mean pushing other cases off the list.
- The CJI has often complained about how a case orally represented by a lawyer during mentioning does not later, when the judges read the papers in detail, turn out to be as urgent as it was initially made out to be by the lawyer.
- For over an hour everyday, the CJI is made to read the case papers just to see whether a case mentioned is important enough to deserve an urgent hearing...this is a waste of judicial time

Concerns

In the past few years, oral mentioning has been both controversial and witnessed reforms.

- CJI Dipak Misra realised how senior advocates use their heft in court to take advantage over other lawyers to get early dates during oral mentioning
- He reminded lawyers that the court cannot be seen to be wasting time when hundreds of death penalty cases are waiting for years to be heard.
- It was the oral mentioning of the Lucknow medical College scam case before Justice (now retired) J.S. Chelameswar that triggered the row about the CJI's powers as 'master of roster'.

Addressal of this issue

- In order to address the above issue new guidelines have been settled by which urgent cases would automatically come up before a Bench for hearing within four days of their being filed.

- If such cases did not come up for hearing, the lawyers concerned could make a mention before the Registrar

Panel concerned at CBI vacancies

Context:

- Increasing number of cases are now being referred to the CBI pertaining to areas like internal security, cybercrimes, corruption, financial irregularities and the nation cannot afford to have its premier investigative agency understaffed and thus ill-prepared.
- So the parliamentary standing committee has raised concern over non-filling of vacancies in the Central Bureau of Investigation, saying it will impact on its performance.

Recommendations

- To overcome the perennial problem of vacancies in the CBI, the committee recommended that the government simplify recruitment rules to overcome the procedural bottlenecks.

- The government may also consider making terms of deputation to the CBI more rewarding in order to retain capable officers and to attract best officers from the State police forces, Central paramilitary forces, Intelligence Bureau, etc
- International Centre of Excellence in Investigation (ICEI-CBI) was to be established at the CBI Academy in Ghaziabad, was to offer world-class certified courses on investigation and prosecution in specialised and emerging domains of crime including cybercrime.
 - * The committee recommended that the CBI and the government should expedite approvals for setting up the ICEI-CBI centre.

12. Sedition and politics

What is Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code?

- Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life or any shorter term, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added, or with fine.
- Explanation 1.-The expression "disaffection" includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.
- Explanation 2.-Comments expressing disapprobation of the measures of the Government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means, without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.
- Explanation 3.-Comments expressing disapprobation of the administrative or other action of the Government without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.

Past Observations Made on Sedition:

- The Law Commission, in a consultation paper released in 2018, had called for a reconsideration of the sedition section in the IPC.
- The Law Commission, headed by Justice (retired) B S Chauhan, had said that the stringent sedition law should be invoked only in cases "where intention" behind the act is to "disrupt public order or to overthrow the Government with violence and illegal means".

A Brief Look at recent cases such as Hiren Gohain:

- Experts opine that the slapping of sedition charges against noted Assamese scholar Hiren Gohain and two others for remarks made against the proposed citizenship law is a textbook case of misuse of the law relating to sedition.

- The FIR against Mr. Gohain, peasant rights activist Akhil Gogoi and journalist Manjit Mahanta relates to speeches at a recent rally that alluded to the possibility of a demand for independence and sovereignty if the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was pushed through Parliament.
- Currently, Mr. Gohain and others have obtained interim bail from the Gauhati High Court.
- The registration of the case has caused much public outrage in Assam.

What have they been accused of?

- In addition to Section 124A (sedition), they have been accused of entering into a criminal conspiracy to "wage war against the government of India" (Section 121) and "concealing a design to facilitate" such a war (Section 123).
- Experts have opined that the action of the police in charging them with "offences against the state" under the Indian Penal Code is quite reprehensible.
- It is possible that speeches at the rally organised by the Forum Against the Citizenship Amendment Bill contained strident opposition to the legislative changes that would allow persecuted non-Muslims from three neighbouring countries to obtain Indian citizenship.
- Experts point out that the thrust of the protest, therefore, would be squarely covered by the exception to the sedition clause, which says comments expressing disapprobation of government measures with a view to obtaining their alteration do not constitute an offence, as long as there is no incitement to violence or disaffection.
- Mr. Gohain, a Sahitya Akademi awardee, and one of Assam's best known public intellectuals, has explained that he had intervened more than once to silence some youth who had talked about invoking their sovereignty if the Centre continued to ignore their demand.
- In recent years, there have been many instances of State governments seeking to silence political dissent by accusing dissenters of promoting disaffection.
- It is precisely to prevent such a heavy-handed response to strident political criticism that courts have often pointed out that the essential ingredient of any offence of sedition is an imminent threat to public order.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that the recent filing of sedition and conspiracy charges against three former Jawaharlal Nehru University students and seven others nearly three years after a political event on its campus, is a needlessly heavy-handed response to campus sloganeering.

- They further point out that the fact that it took so long to ready a charge sheet, which has been filed a few months ahead of the general election, casts a shadow of political motive. They assert that it would have been far wiser to dismiss this as an instance of radicalised student politics than proceed against them with a stringent colonial-era law, which should not have been allowed to even remain in the statute book.
- Also, there is no convincing case that the students, and the others present, disrupted public order or incited violence.
- Further, it is important to note that even if all the charges about the shouting of “anti-national” slogans and supporting those who questioned the country’s sovereignty were true, these acts do not merit the use of the sedition law.
- The Delhi Police had arrested JNU student union leader Kanhaiya Kumar in February 2016, but failed to protect him from assault while being produced in court; it did nothing to bring to book his assailants.
- Currently, in filing formal charges of sedition, experts opine that it continues to ignore the law laid down by the Supreme Court on what constitutes ‘sedition’.
- The essential ingredients of Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, that there should be a call for violence or a pernicious tendency to foment public disorder, are conspicuously absent in the case.

Concluding Remarks:

- Unless there is actual incitement to take up arms or resort to violence, even demands that go against the legal or constitutional scheme of things would not amount to sedition.
- Mere expression of critical views, howsoever scathing, cannot be an excuse for accusing someone of planning to wage war or promote disaffection against the government.
- Finally, while the provision, which is couched in broad terms, needs a much narrower definition, some experts point out that the right course is to scrap Section 124A, a relic of the colonial era, altogether.

13. Let the grassroots breathe

Background

- The Rajasthan Government under Chief Minister Raje passed a law that made it mandatory in 2015 which required candidates contesting the zila parishad and panchayat samiti elections to have passed Class 10 and those contesting sarpanch elections to have passed Class 8.
- Further, it disallowed those without functional toilets in their home to contest. Following this, Haryana also introduced similar restrictions for contesting local body elections.
- The decisions by the Rajasthan and Haryana governments were widely criticised and also challenged in the courts.

Rajbala v. State of Haryana

- In December 2015, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in *Rajbala v. State of Haryana* upheld the validity of the amendments to the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act.
- In a contentious judgment authored by Justice J. Chelameswar, the court held that prescription of educational qualification was justifiable for better administration and did not violate the right to equality enshrined in the Constitution.

Current Context

- The newly elected Ashok Gehlot government in Rajasthan has scrapped the minimum educational qualification criteria for candidates contesting local body elections.
- This reverses the amendments introduced by the previous government
- The latest decision of the Gehlot government has once again revived the debate on the fairness of having such restrictions.

Concerns of having educational qualification

- Prescribing educational qualifications for contesting elections is problematic in multiple ways.
- Fundamentally, it unduly restricts a citizen’s right to contest elections and thereby challenges the basic premise of a republican democracy.
- Denying the right to contest effectively restricts the right of a citizen to vote for a candidate of her choice since more than half the population is restricted from contesting.
- Further, it disproportionately disenfranchises the more marginal sections of society: women, Dalits and poor.
- In a country like India with unequal access to education, it is cruel to blame citizens for the failure of the state to fulfil its constitutional obligations. The decision by the Gehlot government is hence a necessary corrective to an unjust rule.

Was this against the premise of making panchayats and municipalities representative institutions?

The very objective of the 73rd and 74th Amendments that sought to make panchayats and municipalities representative institutions with adequate representation from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women. With the passing of law this led to exclusion of certain sections of society thereby violating the very base on which the law was constructed.

- These restrictions do not exist for those contesting parliamentary or Assembly elections. In fact in the 15th Lok Sabha, 13% of MPs are under-matriculates, a share higher than those of women MPs.

- These restrictions reveal that State governments and courts did not value local governments for their representative character.
 - * On the one hand, this is based on an ill-informed assumption that those with formal education will be better in running panchayats.
 - * On the other, it reveals that State governments and courts place a premium on administration over representation in case of local governments.
- Though local governments now have a definite space within India's constitutional structure, they are still seen as administrative vessels for implementing programmes of the Central and State governments.
- The disqualification of candidates who don't have toilets in their home or defecate in open is clearly an example where the implementation of a Central programme like the Swachh Bharat Mission gets precedence over the need for representative government.

This argument makes one believe that true implementation of 73rd and 74th CAA was not implemented in true spirit but instead became vehicles to drive the agenda of Central and State Govts.

Examples from states where they have denied local democracy

Over the years, many State governments have sought to defang local governments by simply delaying elections on various grounds.

- In Visakhapatnam, elections to its Municipal Corporation were last held in 2007.
- Elections to panchayats and municipalities in Tamil Nadu have not been held since 2011.
- The continual delay in elections goes against the purpose of the 73rd and 74th Amendments which listed the "absence of regular elections" and "prolonged supersessions" as stated reasons behind their introduction.
- These had also mandated the creation of a State Election Commission (SEC) in each State for the preparation of electoral rolls and the conduct of elections to panchayats and municipalities.
 - * However, in most States, tasks like delimitation of seats are still done by the State government instead of the SEC.
 - * It is often under the guise of delimitation of seats that local government elections are delayed, especially when the party in power fears losses.

This undermines the local governments as representative institutions local governments now function as bureaucratic machines without an elected council to hold them accountable.

Conclusion

- India prides itself as a robust democracy, at least in the procedural sense, with regular elections and smooth transfer of power. However, the absence of elected councils in some local governments punches holes in this claim.
- The lack of alarm caused by the denial of local democracy reveals our collective bias regarding the place of local governments.
- Delaying elections and adding restrictions to contest prevent local governments from becoming truly representative institutions.

14. Checks and balances- Center state relationship

Introduction

- As Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi often complained that the Central government was sitting too heavily on the States.
- West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee alleged that "India's federal structure is being bulldozed by the unilateral, arbitrary action of the Centre."
 - * Ms. Banerjee has often espoused the idea that the powers of the Central government should be limited to a few areas like external affairs and defence.
- KCR wants to do away with Concurrent List
 - * The concurrent list includes those subjects on which both Union and State have concurrent powers. These include education, population control and family planning, forests, criminal law, social and economic planning, electricity, marriage, and divorce etc.
 - * However, in case of a conflict between Union law and state law on the same subject, it is the Union law which will prevail overriding the state law.

Concerns

- The Union List and Concurrent List have grown while subjects under the State List have gradually reduced.
- The 42nd Amendment Act was perhaps one of the most controversial. Effected in 1976 during the Emergency by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the amendment restructured the Seventh Schedule ensuring that State List subjects like education, forest, protection of wild animals and birds, administration of justice, and weights and measurements were transferred to the Concurrent List.

Strong center is a must

- Constitutionally, India is a Union, not a federation, of States with a Central government empowered to intervene in State affairs in several ways and even split them.
- There is an unstated bias in the Constitution for national-level parties to run the Central government.
- Any more power to the States would mean making Central authority weaker.

How center's powers are checked?

- Although India is not a federation, the country's Constitution has, in the Rajya Sabha, ensured a strong forum for the States.
- It is a tribute to this institution that the NDA, despite having an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha, has not been allowed to have its way all the time.
- Added to this, the Constitution also created a powerful Supreme Court that checks the Central government from arbitrary exercise of its authority. This is about as far as India can go and yet expect to stay together.

Conclusion

- As Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru most feared the "fissiparous tendencies" that could break India. It was to safeguard against such a possibility that he ensured the Constitution stopped well short of casting India as a federation.
- Time has shown how right the constituent assembly was.

15. Municipal Model is broken**Issue Area**

- India's exploding megacities are in a state of crisis. Officially, about a third of India's population is urban but most contemporary estimates put the figure at closer to half.
- But the combined expenditure of all urban local bodies in India, according to NITI Aayog, is just 1% of the GDP.
- Worse, these city administrations generate only 44% of their finances from their own revenue sources like property taxes and user charges.
- The bulk of municipal expenditure (over 60%) goes towards paying wages and salaries.

Concerns

- A crippling shortage of money is only part of the reason.
- India's system of civic administration, with a permanent bureaucracy and a changing set of political representatives, is broken.
 - * Politically, civic representation is merely seen as a stepping stone to the real stuff.
- The municipal administration is subordinate to the State and Central public services.
- The system is riddled with corruption, the functioning is opaque, and there is virtually no public scrutiny or accountability.

Way forward

The municipal model is broken. India needs to radically rethink the model if its cities are not to become dystopian wastelands.

- Maybe doing away with guaranteed employment in municipal service, and having various civic service chiefs run directly for office, as is the case in the U.S., might be a start.
- It also needs to figure out a sustainable financial model for city governments — levying market-related charges for things like water, road usage and parking is a start.
- Above all, it needs a more aware citizenry, with a greater say in deciding how exactly its tax monies should be spent.

16. Fabrication and falsification – Data manipulation in the MGNREGA**Context:**

- In recent years, there have been at least 74 reported starvation deaths, with 60 cases having occurred in the last two years across parts of India; a lot of them have been in Jharkhand. Based on a directive by the Union Ministry of Rural Development, the Jharkhand government has issued a report on 18 deaths.

Issue:

- Earlier this month, MGNREGA got additional Rs 6,000 crore; highest ever total allocation in a fiscal. But, data manipulation in the scheme is leading to gross violations in its implementation.

Details:

- Crores of people in India struggling to navigate a host of vulnerabilities to scrape out a living. A lack of dignified employment, non-payment of adequate wages on time and insufficient food mean that the families are in a dicey situation and staring at starvation.
- The report issued by the Jharkhand government on 18 deaths is hastily produced and in insensitive language.
- It concludes that none of these deaths was due to starvation or connected to MGNREGA.
- If implemented the proper way, MGNREGA, among other measures, can go a long way in improving the life and the livelihoods people.
- Not only is the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in the State and Centre demonstrating alarming indifference in this matter but is also covering up realities by curating information to suit its false narrative. Such curation starts from suppressing information at the source, to deliberately manipulating and obfuscating data to perpetrate falsehoods.

Examples that illustrate how the manipulation of information is leading to ethical and legal violations:

Under-provision of employment:

- To estimate the extent of under-provision, an ongoing study (for work demand and employment generated for over 5,700 panchayats across 20 States for 2017-18 and the first three quarters of 2018-19) was analysed.
- The employment generated was about 33% lower than the registered work demand, and last year, about 30% lower.

Information suppression at source:

- Numerous ground reports across the country suggest that because of a funds crunch, field functionaries do not even enter the work demanded by labourers in the MGNREGA Management Information System (MIS).
- Lack of offline alternatives to capture work demand from labourers means that data on the MIS are being treated as the gospel truth.
- Besides, the under-registered demand is being dishonoured by the government.
- Although work demand data (in person days) and employment-generated data are available at a panchayat level, aggregate data at the national level are only presented for employment generated.
- Thus, under-registered national demand is captured but intentionally not reported. By doing this, violation of the extent of under-provision of work is being hidden.

Non-implementation of Unemployment Allowance report

- The MGNREGA is a demand-driven programme, i.e., work must be provided within 15 days of demanding work failing which the Centre must pay an unemployment allowance (UA).
- A UA report is generated but rarely implemented.

Avoiding delay compensation:

- The Central government alone was causing an average delay of over 50 days in the disbursement of wages to labourers. The mandate is to pay wages within 15 days else workers are entitled to a delay compensation.
- While this delay by the Central government (called stage 2 delays) is captured in the system, it is intentionally suppressed to avoid paying delay compensation—violation of the Act.

Lack of funds:

- Despite Centre's revised allocations, there is a continued lack of funds.
- Contrary to the Central government's claims of there being more than 90% payments on time, we found in a recent study of more than 9 million transactions that only 21% payments were made on time in 2016-17. The trend continued in 2017-18.

A case of insensitivity:

- In an internal memorandum dated August 21, 2017, the Union Ministry of Finance acknowledged the accuracy of the study's findings and stated that delays in payments were directly linked to lack of availability of funds.
- This glaring gap was argued in the Supreme Court in a recent PIL (Swaraj Abhiyan vs. Union of India) where the judgement categorically stated: "The wages due to the worker in terms of Stage 2 above must be transferred immediately and the payment made to the worker forthwith failing which the prescribed compensation would have to be paid."
- In court, the Central government, agreed to calculate Stage 2 delays, and pay compensation, but has still not been implemented. This not only reflects contempt of court by the Central government.

Conclusion:

- The claims of the "highest ever allocation" become meaningless if the allocation does not honour work demand, as is the case, it is a violation of the Act. If quick and prompt action is not taken and information on realities, starvation and agrarian distress is falsified, the slow death of the MGNREGA will continue.

17. Job on compassionate grounds not a right: SC

Context

- The Supreme Court has reiterated that the policy of compassionate appointment in public service is not a right, but a benefit held out by the state to rescue the family of an employee, who died in harness, from penury.

Background of the case

- The court was hearing an appeal filed by Shashi Kumar, whose father, an employee with the horticulture department in Himachal Pradesh, died suddenly.
- Kumar applied for compassionate appointment, but the State government wrote back saying that the income certificate does not contain the family pension amount received. The State government argued in the High Court that the information about the family pension was required to calculate the financial status of the family and whether it was in need of compassionate appointment. The High Court ruled in favour of Mr. Kumar, following which, the State moved the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court set aside the High Court decision, reasoning that the scheme must take into account the welfare measures provided by the government, including the family pension.

Compassionate Appointment

- The compassionate appointment is an exception to the general rule that appointment to any public post in the service of the state has to be made on the basis of principles which accord with Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution.

- Dependants of a deceased employee of the state are made eligible by virtue of the policy on compassionate appointment. The basis of the policy is that it recognises that a family of a deceased employee may be placed in a position of financial hardship upon the untimely death of the employee while in service.
- It was the “immediacy of the need” which furnishes the basis for the state to allow the benefit of compassionate appointment. Where the authority finds that the financial and other circumstances of the family are such that in the absence of immediate assistance, it would be reduced to being indigent, an application from a dependent member of the family could be considered.

18. Report of the Committee on section 126 of the Representation of the people act, 1951 submitted to the commission

Context:

- The Committee constituted under the chairmanship of Sr. Deputy Election Commissioner Sh. Umesh Sinha to review and suggest modifications and changes in the provisions of the Section 126 and other sections of the Representation of the People Act 1951, provisions of Model Code of Conduct and any other ECI instruction in this regard has submitted its report to the Commission.

what is section 126 representation of the people act 1951?

- The Section 126 of the Representation of the People, 1951, prohibits displaying any election matter by means, inter alia, of television or similar apparatus, during the period of 48 hours before the hour fixed for conclusion of poll in a constituency.

what is the issue related to section 126?

- The task of maintaining campaign silence during last 48 hours before the conclusion of polling is becoming increasingly onerous in the light of the increasing influence of digital media. So, apart from the regulation by law and ECI instructions, the resolve, proactive support and sustained effort by all stakeholders which include political parties, media, civil society organizations, academia and educational institutions, the youth and citizens at large, will remain necessary to contain the evil impact

The committee had the following scope of work:

- Study and examine the present provisions of the Section 126 and other related Sections of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and identify difficulties/critical gaps to regulate the violation of the said provisions of the act, particularly during the prohibitory period of 48 hours before the completion of the poll, mentioned in section 126 and suggest necessary amendment/modification.

- Examine the type, category or growth of communication technology or media platform in the country and difficulties in regulating these media platforms during multiphase election when prohibitory period of 48 hours are in force.
- Impact of new media platforms and social media during the prohibitory period of 48 hours before the close of poll and its implication in view of the provisions of section 126.
- Examine the present provisions of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) related to the above issues and suggest modification in this regard.

The Committee had detailed consultations with all major stakeholders including various political parties, nominees/representatives of the Press Council of India (PCI), the News Broadcasters Association (NBA), the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) as well as representatives of several intermediaries and technology companies including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, and Google. The Committee also had several rounds of discussions and consultations with the legal and other divisions within the ECI.

ECONOMY

1. Aber

- The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) central bank (UAE CB) and the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) have announced that they are co-developing the interbank digital currency called "Aber."
- The project is still in its pilot stage, where they will study the feasibility of using the currency through practical application, see if it reduces remittances costs, and assess risks.
- The project will also be looking into using Aber as an additional reserve system for domestic central payments settlement in case of their disruption for any reason.

2. Asia Competitiveness Institute's (ACI) EDB index

Context:

- Andhra Pradesh emerged on top of Asia Competitiveness Institute (ACI), Singapore's 2018 Ease of Doing Business (EDB) Index ABC rankings for economies of 21 states of India, while Maharashtra and Delhi came in second and third place, respectively.

Details

- EDB index is based upon three parameters called ABC - Attractiveness to Investors, Business Friendliness and Competitiveness Policies
- Asia Competitiveness Institute at Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore was established as a research centre in 2006 with an aim to build intellectual leadership and network for understanding and developing competitiveness in the Asia region.

3. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

- The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a multilateral development bank which was established in 2016 with its headquarters located in Beijing.
- AIIB is a new multilateral financial institution founded to bring countries together to address the daunting infrastructure needs across Asia.
- United States and Japan are not its members.
- It aims to stimulate growth and improve access to basic services by furthering interconnectivity and economic development in the region through advancements in infrastructure.
- AIIB offers sovereign and non-sovereign finance for projects in energy and power, transportation and telecommunications, rural infrastructure and agriculture development, water supply and sanitation, environmental protection, urban development and logistics.

Suspensions about the AIIB in its aims and intentions:

- The initial scepticism towards AIIB was that it was primarily a vehicle to fund BRI-related projects as well as to further China's strategic goals.
- This was partly to do with the fact that The AIIB project was first announced in 2013 simultaneously with Chinese President's mooted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- The initial projects approved by the AIIB in 2016 were granted to China's close allies—mainly in Central Asia and Pakistan, as well as Oman, which was a strategic centre of trade and exchange along the historic maritime Silk Road.
- China is the AIIB's single largest contributor and holds around 28% voting share, giving it veto power over major decisions at the AIIB.
- Currently, a distracted U.S. appears neither willing nor capable of fundamentally reshaping and resourcing the much-vaunted Bretton Woods-era institutions for the challenges of the 21st century.
- India, China and other multilaterally minded major countries will need to pick up this gauntlet in the areas of trade, development and finance.
- The successful mainstreaming of the AIIB in three short years must become just the beginning of system-wide reform and overhaul.

Editorial Analysis:

- Experts opine that on January 16, 2019, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) marked its third anniversary. Further, India has been the bank's biggest beneficiary, with a quarter of the AIIB's approved projects geared towards its development. India is also the only country apart from China to enjoy a permanent seat on the Bank's board of directors.
- Experts point out that when the AIIB opened for business in 2016, critics attacked it as a barely concealed attempt by China, India and the global south to supplant the existing international financial order.
- The reality is that the bank has been both a rule-maker and rule-taker, devising innovations in multilateral development finance while upholding existing best practices. Most of its projects are co-financed with the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank, suggesting a healthy mix of complementarity and competition with its peers.
- Critics have also attacked the AIIB for its non-transparent internal procedures, notably the lack of a resident board, and potentially lax loan appraisal standards, which they claimed would spark a rash of irrecoverable loans.

- It is also important to note that former U.S. President Barack Obama's administration sought to dissuade Western countries and Asian allies from joining the bank as prospective founding members, pointing to concerns related to governance and environmental and social safeguards.
- The reality is that the AIIB's lending practices have been socially conscious and prudent, attested by its triple-A credit rating secured from the three major international rating agencies.
- Disregarding the U.S.'s 'dog in the manger' attitude towards infrastructure finance, 90-odd countries have signed up as founding or prospective members.

The Way Forward:

- Finally, as the AIIB marches from strength-to-strength, experts point out that it should develop a wider portfolio of projects in areas such as smart cities, renewable energy, urban transport, clean coal technology, solid waste management and urban water supply.
- Along with the New Development Bank, its uniqueness must lie in faster loan appraisal, a lean organisational structure resulting in lower cost of loans, a variety of financing instruments, including local currency financing, and flexibility in responding to its clients' needs.
- Also, experts suggest that the AIIB should leverage its unique 'special funds mechanism' to crowd-in infrastructure financing from external sources, including extra-regional, public and private, as well as nurture infrastructure as a profitable asset class for capital market investors.

4. Atal Setu

- It is a 5.1-km long cable-stayed bridge on the Mandovi River in Goa, a third such bridge to connect the state capital with North Goa
- The bridge is constructed by the GIDC (Goa Infrastructure Development Corporation) and engineering and construction major Larsen and Toubro.
- The link will decongest Panaji to a great extent, as approximately 66,000 vehicles enter the capital city every day.

5. Baltic Dry Index

Context

- Baltic Dry Index has fallen by 47% since mid-2018 and Harpex Shipping Index, which tracks container rates, has dropped by 30% since June 2018.

Container cargo



- Toys, televisions, DVDs, clothing, meat and computers; containers are the best way to transport these and many similar products. By efficiently loading the goods, they can be transported simultaneously in large quantities

Dry Bulk



- Dry bulk refers to coal, iron ore, cement, and sand. They are not packaged separately, but transported in large quantities in the hold of a ship, wagon or lorry.

Baltic Dry Index (BDI)

- The Baltic Dry Index (BDI) is a shipping and trade index created by the London-based Baltic Exchange that measures change in the cost of transporting various raw materials.
- The exchange directly contacts shipping brokers to assess price levels for a given route, a product to transport and time to delivery, or speed.
- Baltic Dry Index is a composite of three sub-indices that measure different sizes of dry bulk carriers or merchant ships: Capesize, Panamax and Supramax.
 - * Capesize ships are the largest ships in the BDI with 100,000 Dead Weight Tonnage (DWT) or greater.
 - * Panamax ships have a 60,000 to 80,000 DWT capacity and are used mostly to transport coal, grains and minor bulk products, such as sugar and cement.
 - * The smallest ships included in the BDI are Supramaxes/Handymax with a carrying capacity of 50,000 to 59,999 DWT.

Significance

The A change in the Baltic Dry Index can give investors insight into global supply and demand trends

- An increase in Baltic Index means more raw material is shipped around the world and this means world economy is growing
- Decrease in Baltic Index means global economy is slowing down

HARPEX Shipping Index

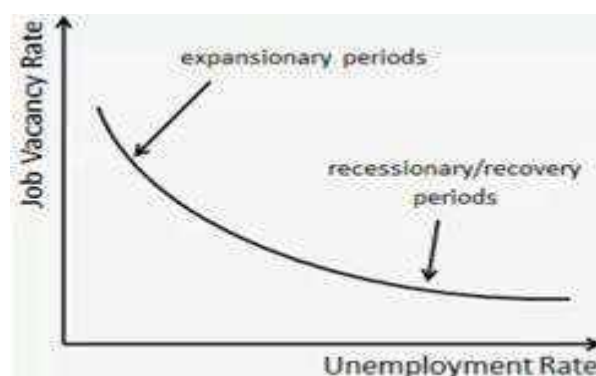
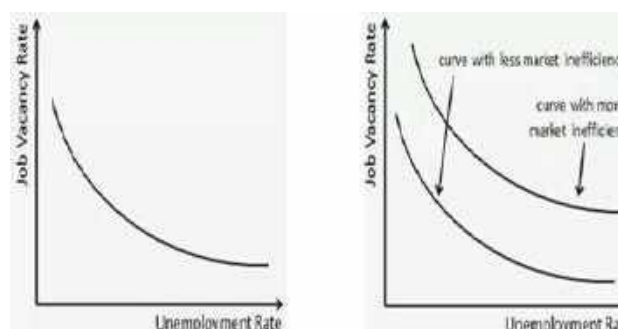
- The HARPEX index is considered a suitable indicator of global economic fleet shipping activity since it tracks changes in freight rates for container ships over broad categories.
- This index is slightly different than the better-known Baltic Dry Index that tracks freight costs for dry bulk ships that usually carry bulk cargoes and raw materials such as coal, ore and grain.

What does it signify?

- Dry-bulk commodities are taken as a leading economic indicator, because they are used in core industrial sectors like steelmaking and power generation, and analysts say the recent declines in activity point to a serious economic slowdown.
- Freight rates for dry-bulk and container ships, carriers of most of the world's raw materials and finished goods, have plunged over the last six months in the latest sign the global economy is slowing significantly.
- Their slump underscores weakening manufacturing data from Asia, Europe and North America.

6. Beveridge curve/ UV curve

- This refers to a graphical representation that shows the relationship between the unemployment rate (on the horizontal axis) and the job vacancy rate (on the vertical axis) in an economy.
- It is named after British economist William Beveridge.
- The Beveridge curve usually slopes downwards because times when there is high job vacancy in an economy are also marked by relatively low unemployment since companies may actually be actively looking to hire new people.
- By the same logic, a low job vacancy rate usually corresponds with high unemployment as companies may not be looking to hire many people in new jobs.

Dry**7. Byorung Bridge****Context**

- India's longest 300-metre single lane steel cable suspension bridge was inaugurated by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister
- The bridge across the Siang River at Yingkiong in Upper Siang district has been named Byorung Bridge.

Details

- It will reduce the distance from Yinkiong to Tuting by almost 40 km
- The road to Tuting, near the China border in Upper Siang district, was 192 km before the bridge was built.

Significance

- The bridge is expected to benefit 20,000 people on either banks of the river, besides bolstering the defence preparedness.

8. Carnot Prize

- It is the Kleinman Center's annual recognition of distinguished contributions to energy policy through scholarship or practice.
- It is named in memory of French scientist Sadi Carnot, who in 1824 published *Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire*, which became the basis for the second law of thermodynamics.

- The Carnot Prize is intended to honor those who have revolutionized understanding of energy policy.

Context

- Kleinman Center for Energy Policy at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design is awarding its fourth annual Carnot Prize to Shri Piyush Goyal
- It is an Acknowledgement of India's climate conscious and development driven energy governance that is fuelling the aspirations of 125 crore people

9. CPRI Regional Testing Laboratory at Nashik

- Central Power Research Institute (CPRI) is an Autonomous body under Ministry of Power, Govt of India serves as an Independent third party testing laboratory.
- Headquarters in Bangalore
- It functions as a centre for applied research in electrical power engineering assisting the electrical industry in product development and quality assurance.
- CPRI also serves as an independent authority for testing and certification of power equipment.

Context

- Union Minister of State (IC) for Power and New & Renewable Energy laid the foundation stone of Regional testing laboratory of Central Power Research Institute (CPRI) at Nashik, Maharashtra

Importance of the laboratory:

- Manufacturers in the western region will be greatly benefited as they can test their products close to their manufacturing units.
- This would reduce the turnaround time and overhead cost.
- This shall help the power utilities in the country to install reliable and quality equipment in the power system network.

10. Credit Guarantee Fund for Startups

- Government is planning to set up a Credit Guarantee Fund (CGF) for encouraging start-up companies with a view to providing funding facilities in the country.

Incentives being provided to Startups under Startup India initiative are:

- Self-Certification under 6 Labour Laws & 3 Environmental Laws
- Relaxations in Public Procurement Norms
- Faster exit under the Bankruptcy Code
- Rebates on Patent & Trademark filing fees, support from facilitators and expedited examination of Patent application
- Income Tax exemption

- Exemption from Income Tax on investments received above fair market value
- Funding support under the Fund of Funds for Startups
- Guidance and facilitation support from Startup India Hub

11. Diffo Bridge

Context

- Raksha Mantri inaugurated the 426.60 metre long Pre Stressed Concrete Box Girder type bridge over Diffo river on Roing-Koron-Paya road in Arunachal Pradesh.

Details

- It would provide uninterrupted access between Dibang valley and Lohit valley region of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh
- It would provide an all-weather Road to the troops deployed on the China Border.

12. DIPP rechristened to include internal trade

Context

- The government has notified changing the name of the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, and has enhanced its role.

Details

- The notification has included four new categories of responsibilities the renamed body will be in charge of, including the
 - * promotion of internal trade (including retail trade),
 - * the welfare of traders and their employees,
 - * matters relating to facilitating Ease of Doing Business, and
 - * Matters relating to start-ups.
- These are in addition to the previous responsibilities of the erstwhile DIPP relating to general industrial policy, administration of the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951, industrial management, productivity in industry, and matters related to e-commerce.

13. E commerce Rules

- Private Labels:
 - * The first restriction explicitly disallows e-commerce marketplace companies from selling private labels that is brands they directly or indirectly own, on their platforms.
 - * E-commerce companies would be barred from selling products sourced from firms in which they have stake in or control over.

- * From the point of view of the vendor too, the clarification said that an entity with equity stake owned by an e-commerce marketplace entity or its group companies, or having control on its inventory by e-commerce marketplace entity or its group companies, will not be permitted to sell its products on the platform run by such marketplace entity.
- Exclusive Deals
 - * In November 2018, the OnePlus 6T phone went on sale exclusively on Amazon.in, besides being available on the phone company's own website.
 - * Samsung launched its new A9 phone exclusively on Flipkart.com. Such "exclusive sale" deals are common and popular across e-commerce platforms in India. Well, not anymore.
 - * The government has made it clear that no e-commerce marketplace platform can mandate a seller to sell exclusively on the platform.
- Cash Back Services
 - * For the purposes of this clause, provision of services to any vendor on such terms which are not made available to other vendors in similar circumstances will be deemed unfair and discriminatory
- Any service like logistics provided by e-commerce companies to vendors in which they have direct or indirect equity participation or common control stake, should be fair and non-discriminatory.
 - * These services include logistics, warehousing, advertisement, marketing, payments, financing etc.
- The policy says a vendor will not be permitted to sell more than 25% of its products on an online platform of a single e-marketplace firm.

How it helps domestic Players?

- The biggest winners from the new guidelines will be the traditional brick-and-mortar sellers. In the past few years, online marketplaces had hit the brick-and-mortar hard.
 - * They had started luring away so many customers with discounts and cashbacks — and of course the ease of buying without stepping out — that brick-and-mortar retail was seen to be dying off soon.
 - * The new guidelines restricting discounts and cashbacks will help brick-and-mortar retailer retain customers.
 - * The Confederation of All India Traders welcomed the move
- The revised norms are aimed at protecting the interest of domestic players, who have to face tough competition from e-retailers having deep pockets from foreign investors

- The smaller ecommerce companies which don't have piles of money to compete with giants like Amazon will stand to gain from the new norms. Welcoming the new guidelines, Snapdeal founder said "Snapdeal welcomes updates to FDI policy on e-commerce. Marketplaces are meant for genuine, independent sellers, many of whom are MSMEs. These changes will enable a level playing field for all sellers, helping them leverage the reach of e-commerce."
- Another smaller ecommerce player ShopClues too welcomed the new guidelines.

Small sellers

- Smaller sellers on online platforms, which have been contesting the preferential treatment meted out by Flipkart and Amazon to their entities, have reason to cheer.
- Any service on an ecommerce platform – logistics, warehousing or easy financing options – will now have to be offered to all sellers and not to only preferred sellers.
- Ecommerce companies cannot charge additional prices from third-party sellers for these services.
- Even for private labels, etailers may not be able to advertise or promote their own brands while charging third-party sellers for pushing them.

Concerns for Companies

- The move could adversely impact investments being made to bring new sellers on board.
- This will also impact the FDI investments in India.

Customers

- Consumers may no longer enjoy the deep discounts offered by retailers that have a close association with marketplace entities.

14. GAFA tax

Context

- France will introduce its own tax on large internet and technology companies from January 1

Details

- It is named after Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon
- It is being introduced to combat attempts by the firms to avoid paying what is considered a "fair share" of taxes in the country, by taking advantage of European tax laws
- Major technology companies have come under the scrutiny of lawmakers in countries like France and Britain for allegedly routing profits through operations in countries with extremely low tax rates or other arrangements.

15. GDP Debate

Background

- In January 2015, the government moved to a new base year of 2011-12 from the earlier base year of 2004-05 for national accounts. The base year of national accounts had been revised earlier in January 2010.
- In the new series, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) did away with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at factor cost, and adopted the international practice of valuing industry-wise estimates as gross value added (GVA) at basic prices.
- With the move to the new base year, the growth rate of the economy for 2013-14 was estimated at 6.9%; it was 4.7% on the 2004-05 base. Similarly, the growth rate for 2012-13 was revised upwards to 5.1% from 4.5%.

Methods of estimation

Back series can be generated in three ways, the Committee on Real Sector Statistics said

- one, based on the new GDP methodology by using the base data wherever available;
- two, based on a production shift approach;
- three, by projecting the old series using the base year 2004-05 forward, and then adjusting it to the 2011-12 base by comparing with the new series. The third approach is yet to be tried, the Committee said.

Rebasing the GDP

- This is done by the government often to ensure that the GDP represents the true picture of the economy in terms of structural changes, importance of the various sectors, contribution of agriculture sector etc
- The Present rebasing has been done by CSO taking into consideration the recommendations given the SNA (System of National Accounts) published by UN in 2008.

Old vs New

- In the older system, IIP was used to measure the manufacturing and trading activity. This accounted for the volume changes but not value changes.
 - * In the newer methodology we use the concept of GVA - Gross Value Added, which measures the value addition done to the economy.
- In the older system, GDP was first estimated by using the IIP data and then updated using the ASI data (Annual Survey of Industries). ASI accounted only for those firms which were registered under the Factories Act.
 - * In the newer system, data from MCA21 is used (MCA 21 is an e-governance initiative of Ministry of Corporate Affairs, launched in 2006, it allows the firms/companies to electronically file their financial results. Under this data from more than 5,00,000 firms is collected)

- In the older system, farm produce was taken as a proxy for the calculation of agricultural income.
 - * The new methodology has widened the scope for calculating value addition in the agricultural sector
- In the older system, very few mutual funds and NBFCs were considered for considering the financial activity.
 - * In the new methodology, the coverage has been expanded by including stock brokers, asset management funds, pension funds, stock exchanges etc
- In the older system the trading income data was used from the NSSO's 1999 establishment survey against this
 - * the new series uses the 2011-12 survey

Issues/concerns with the new methodology

- The revised data does not reflect the other macroeconomic parameters - tax revenues, credit growth, trade performance, corporate sales, profits, more importantly the level of investment in the economy etc
- The MCA21 data was collected only from 2008 then how can it be used to compare the earlier growth/production
- The Bank Credit Growth has averaged 20.3% between FY07 to FY12 and 12.3% between FY13 to FY18, during the same tenure the
 - * GDP growth rates have averaged 6.7% and 6.9% respectively (against the older growth rates of 8% and 6.9% respectively)
- There has been inconsistency even in case of the Investment Growth. Between FY07 to FY12, the growth rate of investment was 10.7% and 5.3% between FY13 to FY18
- Tax collections between FY07 to FY12 have grown by 16.5% and then post that by 13.8%. There is a close relation between the GDP growth and the tax collections growth. With higher growth, tax collections increase
- The inflation rate averaged 9.6% between FY07 to FY12 and 6.4% thereafter. If the growth was driven by higher demand then, there should have been higher inflation rate in the second part
- The gross investment to GDP ratio was peaking at 38% (FY08 to FY11) during the UPA government against the 30.3% (FY15 to FY18) in the present government (as per the economic theory, higher the investments, higher the growth in the GDP).
 - * So how can the GDP growth during the present government be higher than the previous government when the investment is lower.

- * This could happen in cases where the production become very efficient leading to lower ICOR (Incremental Capital Output Ratio). But during the present government the twin shocks - Demonetisation and GST - have ensured that this is not the case
- The exports during the UPA government boomed at an average growth rate of over 20% against the zero percentage growth rate in the last four years
- This kind of discussion damages the reputation of non-political institutions such as CSO
- The data has been prepared from 2004-05 to 2010-11 and this coincides the period of UPA govt. Whether intended or not, this looks like a political opportunism

Arguments in favor of new methodology

- The decline in the bank credit growth can be explained by
 - * Increased capital efficiency
 - * Banks facilitating credit to the corporates through instruments such as commercial papers, bonds etc
- Inconsistency in investment
 - * Increased economic efficiency
 - * Decreased ICOR (Incremental Capital Output Ratio - measures higher/incremental amount of capital needed to increase the production by a unit)
 - * There is no uniform relation between the growth and investment. The cycle is revived through consumption and then investment kicks in
- The tax collections could also have been varied because of various other factors such as higher compliance, changes in tax rates etc

Way forward

- Allow the CSO to independently calculate, seek feedback and publish new data. The data/results should be realistic and reflective of the ground reality. In case of India it seems like the results are dependent on the government at the helm rather than the data that is collected. In such scenarios this will dent the image of India at the international level
- If the CSO wants to make it more transparent, it can seek the opinion/involvement of experts. This wasn't done in the present context and the involvement of NITI Aayog in the announcement of data only made it worse
- GDP is just a statistical tool. There should be more focus on inclusive growth rather than just the growth. Inclusive growth entails not just the growth but also the benefits derived by the growth in the form of development

- * It doesn't make any sense to have farmer suicides in Maharashtra which is one of the wealthiest states in India
- * This dichotomy can be seen where India is ranked 6th globally in terms of nominal GDP, top in terms of growth rates but 130th in case of HDI and 108th in WEF's Gender Gap Index!
- * As per Credit Suisse the wealth of top 1 percent has increased from 40% to 60% (between 2010 to 2016) and top 10% owns 90% of the wealth
- * As per a report prepared by Azim Premji University, the growth for India has averaged 7% and the employment growth has been at 1%. Within this also the ones who are getting the formal jobs were receiving decreasing share of total output
- Though this would be very difficult but India could look into Chain Linking methodology or index. Wherein the developed economies keep updating their GDP calculation methodology very often
- Moreover, the government has already announced that the base year is going to be changed likely to 2018-19, if it's done then these numbers will be revised all over again

16. Global Commission on Future of Work

Context

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) released the report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work and has dealt with the emerging unemployment crisis due to spread of automation and other technological innovations.

Details

- According to various estimates, two-thirds of jobs in the developing world are susceptible to automation.
- The Commission report has flagged off concerns over it, and has also articulated on making technological innovation responsive to the pressing need for employment.
- Technological advances – artificial intelligence, automation and robotics – will create new jobs, but those who lose their jobs in this transition may be the least equipped to seize the new opportunities. Today's skills will not match the jobs of tomorrow and newly-acquired skills may quickly become obsolete
- Automation can reduce worker control and autonomy, as well as the richness of work content, resulting in a potential de-skilling and decline in worker satisfaction

Recommendations

- It demands that final decisions on work should be taken by human beings, not by 'algorithms'.

- A universal labour guarantee that protects fundamental workers' rights, an adequate living wage, limits on hours of work and safe and healthy workplaces.
- Guaranteed social protection from birth to old age that supports people's needs over the life cycle.
- A universal entitlement to lifelong learning that enables people to skill, reskill and upskill.
- Managing technological change to boost decent work, including an international governance system for digital labour platforms.
- Greater investments in the care, green and rural economies.
- A transformative and measurable agenda for gender equality.
- Reshaping business incentives to encourage long-term investments.

17. **INDUS FOOD 2019**

Context

- INDUS FOOD-II with the theme of 'World Food Supermarket' will be held at India Expo Mart, Greater Noida.

Aim:

- The event is aimed at promoting India as a strong and reliable exporter of food and beverage products to the world. INDUS FOOD 2019 will promote value addition to India's agriculture exports and integrate Indian farmers and agricultural products with global value chains.
- The event will lead to greater interaction of Indian exporters with global customers leading to enhanced product development and better price realization in international markets.

what is indus food 2019?

- INDUS FOOD is a global platform where top exporters from Food and Beverage Industry of India will be participating and buyers from across the world have been invited.
- It enables B2B engagements of buyers and suppliers, after careful business matchmaking, which takes care of precise business requirements of each participant, and enables him to pick and choose whom to meet.

who organised?

- The event is organized jointly by Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) and Department of Commerce.

18. **Inflation targeting**

- This refers to an approach to monetary policy where the primary mandate of a central bank is to manage the rate of price inflation in the wider economy.

- Economists who support inflation targeting believe that a stable inflation rate is essential to keep the economy fully employed while protecting the value of the currency at the same time.
- Central banks with an explicit inflation targeting mandate usually have a target range of inflation.
- They try to keep inflation within the target range by adjusting the economy's money supply.
- The policy of inflation targeting, which was first introduced in some European countries in the 1970s, became a popular approach in the 1990s.

19. **Inter-State Disparities**

Introduction

- India, as the world's fastest-growing major economy, may well be catching up with the richer economies in terms of absolute size.
- But economic convergence within the country remains a distant dream as poorer States continue to lag behind the richer ones in economic growth.

Crisil Report

- It has found that the inter-State disparities have widened in recent years even as the larger economy grows in size and influence on the global stage.
- Many low-income States have experienced isolated years of strong economic growth above the national average. Bihar, in fact, was the fastest-growing State this year among the 17 non-special category States evaluated by the report.
 - * But they have still failed to bridge their widening gap with the richer States since they have simply not been able to maintain a healthy growth rate over a sustained period of time.
- Richer States like Gujarat, for instance, have been able to achieve sustained economic growth and increase their gap over other States.
- The report found that there was a slight, albeit weak, convergence in the per capita income levels of the poorer and richer States between fiscal years 2008 and 2013, but the trend was reversed in the subsequent years.

Stats

- Between fiscal years 2013 and 2018, there has been a significant divergence rather than convergence in the economic fortunes of the poorer and richer States.
- This was the result of richer States continuing to show strong growth while the poorer States fell behind.
- In fact, only two of the eight low-income States in 2013 had growth rates above the national average over the next five years.
- On the other hand, six out of the nine high-income States recorded rates higher than the national average during 2013-18.

What explains the divergence in the economic fortunes of States?

- The report suggests that, at least during fiscal year 2018, government spending may be what boosted gross domestic product growth in the top-performing States, particularly in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh whose double-digit growth rates have come along with a burgeoning fiscal deficit.
- The impact of greater spending was that 10 of the 17 States breached the 3% fiscal deficit limit set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.
- Many other big-spending States, however, have not managed to achieve growth above the national average.
 - * This suggests that the size of public spending is probably not what differentiates the richer States from the poorer ones.
- Other variables like the strength of State-level institutions, as gauged by their ability to uphold the rule of law and create a free, competitive marketplace for businesses to thrive, and the quality of public spending could be crucial determinants of the long-run growth prospects of States.

ARC recommendations

- Union and State Governments should adopt a formula for Block-wise devolution of funds targeted at more backward areas.
 - * Governance needs to be particularly strengthened in more backward areas within a State.
 - * The role of 'special purpose vehicles' such as backward area development boards and authorities in reducing intra-State disparities needs to be reviewed.
 - * It is advisable to strengthen local governments and make them responsible and accountable.
- A system of rewarding States (including developed States) achieving significant reduction in intra-State disparities should be introduced.
- Additional funds need to be provided to build core infrastructure at the inter-district level in less developed States and backward regions in such States. The quantum of assistance should be made proportionate to the number of people living in such areas.

20. Joint Supply

- This refers to a situation where the supply of two or more goods is inextricably linked. The increase or decrease in the supply of one of the goods will cause the supply of the other good to also increase or decrease at the same time.
- The increase in the supply of cows, for instance, simultaneously increases the supply of both milk as well as meat in the market. So the prices of both milk and meat will be affected by the rearing of more cows by farmers.

- The demand for jointly supplied goods, however, may not be commensurate with the available supply of each of the goods. The demand for milk, for instance, may be greater than the demand for meat in certain markets.

21. Kadaknath chicken/ Kali Masi - Madhya Pradesh

- They are breed of chicken local to Jhabua and Dhar districts of western Madhya Pradesh
- This chicken is in high demand due to its high protein and very low fat and cholesterol levels
- It is the only animal to have a GI Tag in India.
- The protein-rich meat of Kadaknath, chicks and eggs are sold at a much higher rate than other varieties of chicken.

22. Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA)

Background

- There is rising farm distress which has prompted many states to look for alternatives to provide relief to farmers, with many chief ministers announcing loan waivers and some implementing major schemes.
- Odisha is showing the country a new way under 'KALIA' programme, which is expected to provide financial, livelihood and cultivation support along with insurance support to small, marginal and the landless farmers.

Details

- Assistance for cultivation: The state government under the scheme will provide financial assistance of Rs 10,000 per family (Rs 5,000 each for kharif and Rabi season) to the small and marginal farmers (around 30 lakh) for taking up cultivation.
- Assistance for Livelihood: Financial Assistance of Rs 12,500 will be provided to each landless Agricultural Household for agricultural allied activities like for small goat rearing unit, mini-layer unit, duckery units, fishery kits for fisherman, mushroom cultivation and bee-keeping, etc.
- Assistance for vulnerable agricultural household: Vulnerable cultivators and landless agricultural labourers will get financial assistance of Rs 10,000 per family per year to enable them to take care of their sustenance.
 - * The vulnerable cultivator and landless agricultural labourers those who are in old age, having disability or disease and are vulnerable for any other reason.
- Life insurance for cultivators & landless agricultural labourers:

- * Life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh at a very nominal premium of Rs 330/ will be provided to all savings bank account holder of age between 18-50 years. Odisha government will bear farmers' share of the annual premium of Rs 165.
- * Personal accident cover of Rs 2 lakh at a very nominal annual premium of Rs 12 for all savings bank account holder aged between 18-50 years.
- Interest-free crop loan: Vulnerable landless labourers, cultivators and agricultural families identified by Gram Panchayats will be provided with crop loans up to Rs 50,000 made available at 0% interest

Significance

- With KALIA, Naveen Patnaik has refused to write off farm loans. Meanwhile, he is helping maintain repayment discipline in the banking system
- Loan waivers penalise honest farmers who repay on time and can discourage them from doing so.

Concern

- Odisha is a backward state with fewer financial and administrative resources, the government may face great difficulty in implementing the scheme.

23. National Conclave on Technical Textiles at Mumbai

Context:

- Ministry of Textiles will hold National Conclave on Technical Textiles in Mumbai. The event will also be a curtain raiser for Techno Tex 2019.

What are technical textiles?

- Ministry Technical textiles are textile material and products manufactured primarily for technical performance and functional properties rather than aesthetic and decorative characteristics. They find application not only in clothing but also in areas like agriculture, medical, infrastructure, automotive, aerospace, sports, defence and packaging.

Details about conclave:

- Several panel discussions will be held on subjects like administrative consolidation of technical textiles items, manufacturing possibilities and import substitution, benefits of standardization and global best practices, technical textiles codes for New India, investment opportunity in technical textiles sector and research & development in technical textiles by eminent panellists drawn from various Central Government departments, NITI Aayog, IITs and textile industry.

24. National Workshop on Agri Export Policy

Context:

- Minister of State for Commerce & Industry hosted a workshop on new agri export policy.

About:

- This is the first time that an agri export policy has been formulated and it is comprehensive involving all related sectors like R&D, clusters, logistics and transportation. Workshops like these will help to identify bottlenecks, get feedback and suggestions to improve and overcome difficulties in the implementation of the policy.

The vision of the agri export policy:

- To harness the export potential of Indian agriculture, through suitable policy instruments and make India a global power in agriculture and double farmers income by 2022.

The objectives of the agri export policy:

- To double agricultural exports from present USD 30 billion to USD 60 billion by 2022 and reach USD 100 billion in the next few years.
- To diversify export basket, destinations and boost high value and value-added agricultural exports including a focus on perishables,
- To promote novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic and non-traditional agri products, institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers/SPS,
- To strive to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with GVC and enable farmers to get the benefit of export opportunities in overseas markets.

25. Nilekani to head RBI panel on digital payments

Context:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up a five-member committee headed by Infosys chairman Nandan Nilekani to suggest a strategy for deepening of digital payments in the country.

Details

- The panel will review the existing status of digitisation of payments in the country, identify the current gaps in the ecosystem, and suggest ways to bridge them
- The panel will assess the current levels of digital payments in financial inclusion, undertake cross country analyses to identify the best practices that can be adopted in to accelerate digitisation and financial inclusion through greater use of digital payments.
- The panel will also suggest measures to strengthen the safety and security of digital payments and provide a roadmap for increasing customer confidence while accessing financial services through digital modes.

26. **NK Singh (FRBM Review) Committee**

Context:

- According to the Status Paper on Government Debt for 2017-18, the Centre's total debt as a percentage of GDP reduced to 46.5% in 2017-18 from 47.5% as of March 31, 2014.
- The total debt of the States, however, has been rising over this period, to 24% in 2017-18, and is estimated to be 24.3% in 2018-19.
- While the Centre is moving in the right direction in terms of meeting the N.K. Singh Committee recommendations on public debt, the States are moving in the opposite direction, data released by the government show.

Recommendations of the NK Singh (FRBM Review) Committee

The FRBM Review Committee headed by former Revenue Secretary, NK Singh was appointed by the government to review the implementation of FRBM. In its report submitted in January 2017, titled, 'The Committee in its Responsible Growth: A Debt and Fiscal Framework for 21st Century India', the Committee suggested that a rule based fiscal policy by limiting government debt, fiscal deficit and revenue deficits to certain targets is good for fiscal consolidation in India.

- The N.K. Singh-headed FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Review Committee report had recommended the ratio to be 40% for the Centre and 20% for the States, respectively, by 2023.
- It said that the 60% consolidated Central and State debt limit was consistent with international best practices, and was an essential parameter to attract a better rating from the credit ratings agencies.
- A fiscal deficit of 2.5% of GDP (gross domestic product) by financial year 2022-23.
- It has also recommended certain strict 'escape clauses' which will allow the government deviate from the fiscal road map by 0.5% for any given year.
- It suggested the setting up of a 'fiscal council', an independent body which will be tasked with monitoring the government's fiscal announcements for any given year. It will provide its own forecasts and analysis for the same as well as advise the finance ministry on triggering the escape clauses.
- To ensure these escape clauses are not misused by the government, the panel said they have been defined very narrowly and specifically. The escape clauses are proposed for overriding consideration of national security like acts of war, calamities of national proportion and collapse of agriculture, etc.,
- They can be invoked by the Centre after formal consultations and advice of the fiscal council. It also provided that it should be accompanied by a clear commitment to return to the original fiscal target in the ensuing fiscal year.

- The panel's report also says that the focus of policymakers should be on reducing primary deficit rather than fiscal deficit.

27. **Panda bonds**

Context

- Pakistan's cabinet has approved the issuance of first-ever renminbi-denominated bonds to raise loans from China's capital markets, as the country moved a step forward to give the Chinese currency a status at par with the US dollar.

Details

- A Panda bond is a Chinese renminbi-denominated bond from a non-Chinese issuer
- The first two Panda bonds were issued in October 2005 on the same day by the International Finance Corporation and the Asian Development Bank.

Partnership Summit

- The Partnership Summit 2019 is being organised by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Maharashtra Government and the Confederation of Indian Industry.
- It is the global platform for dialogue, debates and engagement among the experts on economic policy and growth trends in India
- It is expected to build new partnerships and explore investment opportunities through high-level exchanges and B2B meetings.

28. **Petrotech**

Context

- 13th International Oil & Gas Conference & Exhibition is being organised under the aegis of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas

Details

- The three-day mega event will showcase the recent market and investor friendly developments that have taken place in the India's oil and gas sector.
- It is expected to see participation of over 86 eminent speakers and 7000 delegates from around 70 countries, including technologists, scientists, planners, policy-makers, management experts, entrepreneurs, service-providers and vendors.
- The PETROTECH 2019 exhibition will focus on development in technologies for exploration & production, process control, refining and pipeline and services, systems, products, oil field hardware, software, analytical instruments, Renewable, R&D, HSE, training and publications of technical literature.

29. Recombinant Elisa Kits

Context

- Union Minister of Agriculture & Farmers released recombinant Enzyme-linked immune sorbent assay (ELISA) kits: one for Glanders and other for Equine Infectious Anaemia. Both these diseases are notifiable diseases in India and require special diagnosis for control and eradication in the country.

About glanders diseases:

- Glanders is a fatal infectious and notifiable disease of equines including horses, donkeys and mules. The disease is caused by a bacterium known as *Burkholderia mallei* and has zoonotic potential. The organism is also considered as potential bio-weapon and categorized under 'Tier 1 Select Agent'.

Who developed elisa kit?

- National Research Centre on Equines (NRCE) has been able to develop a recombinant Hcp1 antigen ELISA as an alternate to complement-fixation test (CFT). The ELISA has been duly validated in India and the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) Reference Laboratory, Germany.

About equine infectious anaemia (eia):

- Equine infectious anaemia (EIA) is a chronic, debilitating and persistent infectious disease of equines caused by a retrovirus. It is an OIE (Office International des Epizooties) notifiable disease. N

NRCE has also developed recombinant p26 protein-based ELISA as an alternative to Coggin's test. This technology will provide sustainable and homogeneous source of antigen and harmonized protocol to ensure regular surveillance of EIA.

30. Repugnant market

- This refers to certain markets where transactions between willing buyers and sellers are considered to be unethical.
- The market for human organs, for instance, is considered by many to be a repugnant market.
- A section of people believe that organ transplants should be facilitated through voluntary donations rather than through the exchange of money.
- Many governments have banned the functioning of these markets due to various moral concerns that have been raised.
- Supporters of repugnant markets, however, believe that allowing the exchange of money helps people in serious need to gain easier access to supplies than they would otherwise.

31. Survey on Retail Payment Habits of Individuals (SRPHi)

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched a survey to understand the "Retail Payment Habits of Individuals" (SRPHi).

Details

- According to the central bank, the survey will cover a sample of 6,000 individuals from different socio-economic background across six cities, viz., Delhi, Mumbai Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru and Guwahati
- The survey seeks qualitative responses from individuals on their payment habits. The findings may provide some idea about awareness and usage habits of digital payment products

32. Swap Ratio

- It is an exchange ratio used in case of mergers and acquisitions
- It is the ratio in which the acquiring company offers its own shares in exchange for the target company's shares.
- To calculate the swap ratio, companies analyze financial ratios such as book value, earnings per share, profits after tax and dividends paid, as well as other factors, such as the reasons for the merger or acquisition.

33. Tokenization- Customers cannot be charged for availing service says RBI

Context

- The Reserve of India (RBI) has allowed all card payment networks to offer tokenization service, thereby the central bank has made it clear that no charges should be recovered from the customer for availing this service.

Tokenization

- Tokenization aims at improving safety and security of the payment system,
- It refers to replacement of actual card details with a unique alternate code called the 'token', which shall be unique for a combination of card, token requestor and identified device
- It masks sensitive card details like card and CVV number.
- The token is used to perform card transactions in contactless mode at Point of Sale (POS) terminals, Quick Response (QR) code payments, etc.
- Customers do not need to enter card number, CVV, expiry date etc online
- Card token is a string of random characters that represents a secure and encrypted credit card stored by payment processor that one can use when one needs without risking exposure of sensitive data

Details

- RBI has given permission to offer tokenized card transactions services to all channels such as Near Field Communication (NFC), Magnetic Secure Transmission (MST) based contactless transactions, in-app payments, QR code-based payments or token storage mechanisms, including cloud, secure element and trusted execution environment.
- At present, tokenised card transaction facility would be offered through mobile phones or tablets only and will be extended to other devices later based on experience. Tokenisation and de-tokenisation shall be performed only by the authorised card network and recovery of original Primary Account Number (PAN) should be feasible for the authorised card network only.
- The central bank also asked card issuers to ensure easy access to customers for reporting loss of 'identified device' or any other such event which may expose tokens to unauthorised usage.
- Registration of a card on token requestors app shall be done only with explicit customer consent through Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA), and not by way of a forced / default/automatic selection of check box, radio button.

34. Transport Subsidy Scheme

- In order to facilitate the process of industrialization in hilly, remote and inaccessible areas, transport incentive is provided to the states of North Eastern Region (including Sikkim) under North Eastern Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS) - 2017, Jammu & Kashmir under Industrial Development Scheme - 2017 and Lakshadweep and A&N Islands under Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Island Development Scheme - 2018.
- Under these schemes, all eligible industrial units can avail incentive on transportation of only finished goods through Railways or the Railway Public Sector Undertakings, Inland Waterways or scheduled airline (shipping for Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands also) for a period of five years from the date of commencement of commercial production / operation.

Freight Subsidy Scheme (FSS), 2013

- The Freight Subsidy Scheme (FSS), 2013, replaced the Transport Subsidy Scheme, 1971, was in operation in all 8 States of North Eastern Region, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, J&K, Darjeeling District of West Bengal, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep islands.
- The Freight Subsidy Scheme (FSS), 2013 has been discontinued with effect from 22.11.2016.

- However, the industrial units registered under these schemes during their currency, are eligible for the benefits of the scheme for the period specified therein.
- While the inland transport incentive is available for certain landlocked states, there is no proposal to provide the same to the state of Chhattisgarh.

35. Trinitea

- It is a project taken up by tea estates in North to provide support to Small Tea Growers (STG) at the farm and market level due to their rising importance in the supply chain.
- The STG sector's share in total Indian tea crop has been rising steadily and now constitutes 47% of the total production.

Details

- A MoU was signed between the Indian Tea Association (ITA) the apex body of North Indian tea producers and Solidaridad for jointly implementing this project, which aims at providing support to STGs in the form of customized farm management as well as access to real time information on climate, soil and markets.
- Solidaridad is a network which works to promote sustainable production of 13 commodities across nine regions globally.

36. UK Sinha Committee**Context**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) set up an expert committee under former Sebi chairman U.K. Sinha to suggest long-term solutions for the economic and financial sustainability of the MSME sector.

Details

- The eight-member committee will also examine the factors affecting the timely and adequate availability of finance to the sector.
- The MSME panel has been asked to review the current institutional framework in place to support the MSME sector and study the impact of the recent economic reforms on the sector and "identify the structural problems affecting its growth".
- To study the global best practices with respect to MSMEs and recommend its adoption in India, wherever appropriate, and review the existing MSME-focused policies and its impact on the sector are among the issues which the panel will look into.
- The U.K. Sinha-led MSME panel has also been asked to propose measures for leveraging technology in accelerating growth of the sector and suggest long-term solutions for the economic and financial sustainability of the MSME sector.

37. Universal Basic Income

- Universal Basic Income is a periodic, unconditional cash transfer to every citizen in the country. Here, social or economic positions of the individual are not taken into consideration. The concept of universal basic income has three main features. They are as following:
 - * 1. UBI is universal in nature. It means UBI is not targeted.
 - * 2. The second feature of UBI is cash transfer instead of in-kind transfer.
 - * 3. The third feature is that UBI is unconditional. That means one need not prove his or her unemployment status or socio-economic identity to be eligible for UBI.

Basic Income Pilot Projects:

- In 2010-2013 Indian policymakers conducted two important studies testing the impact of unconditional cash transfers in Madhya Pradesh and Delhi.
- The first study conducted from January to December 2011 in New Delhi tested the impact of cash transfers when offered in conjunction with existing public welfare.
- The Indian government in partnership with Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Madhya Pradesh state government, carried out a controlled trial. This experiment gave randomly selected households, a fixed amount per month.
- Under this pilot project, over 6,000 men, women and children were provided with modest basic incomes, paid in cash, monthly, without conditions.
- The money was not much, coming to about a third of subsistence. But it was paid individually, with men and women receiving equal amounts and with children receiving half as much, paid to the mother or surrogate mother.
- The pilots involved the (SEWA) and financial assistance from UNICEF and the UNDP.

Outcomes of the pilot project:

- The outcomes exceeded expectations, partly because everybody in the community, and not just select people, received their own individual transfer.
- Nutrition improved
- Sanitation improved
- Health and health care improved
- School attendance and performance improved
- Women's status and well-being improved
- Position of the disabled and vulnerable groups improved by more than others.
- The amount and quality of work improved.

Above all, the basic incomes improved the community spirit and were emancipatory. Critics said it would be a waste of money, but they were proved wrong.

Details

- Economic Survey for the year 2016-17 has an entire chapter dedicated to the discussion on Universal Basic Income (UBI). The chapter speaks of how a basic income could be rolled out across India, and is affordable.
- Its main author, former Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian, and others such as Professor Pranab Bardhan have proposed ways of paying for it — primarily by rolling back existing wasteful, distortionary, and mostly regressive subsidies.

Has the time come for implementation of Universal Basic Income in India?

- The international debate on basic income has advanced considerably in the past five years. Experiments have been launched in countries of different levels of per capita income, which include Canada, Finland, Kenya, Namibia, the Netherlands, Spain and the U.S., with plans being drawn up in England, Scotland, South Korea and elsewhere. India could take the lead.
- It has the technological capacity, the financial resources and, above all, the need for a simple, transparent scheme to liberate the energies of the masses now mired in economic insecurity, deprivation and degradation. And now is a moment of transformative potential.

Arguments for Universal Basic Income:

- A basic income would be a more equitable and economically rational way of addressing what is undoubtedly an unfolding rural tragedy, in place of farm loan waivers. No doubt farm loan waivers would lessen the burden on a hard-pressed social group, and lessen rural poverty, but it is a populist measure. It will be popular, but will not alter structures and is bad economics.
- The beauty of moving towards a modest basic income would be that all groups would gain. That would not prevent special additional support for those with special needs, nor be any threat to a progressive welfare state in the longterm.
- UBI would give individuals freedom to spend the money in a way they choose.
- UBI would help them to choose the kind of work they want to do, rather than forcing them to do unproductive work to meet their daily requirements.
- UBI will result in equitable distribution of wealth. Only poor will receive the full net benefits.

- UBI is easy to implement. There is no need to identify the beneficiaries. Thus it excludes errors in identifying the intended beneficiaries – which is a common problem in targeted welfare schemes.
- It promotes efficiency by reducing wastages in government transfers, thereby reducing the scope for corruption.
- Many social sector schemes could be replaced by UBI, thereby cutting down bureaucratic costs and time.
- UBI will facilitate financial inclusion, as transferring basic income directly into bank accounts will increase the demand for financial services.

Arguments against Universal Basic Income:

- An unconditional minimum amount every month could make people lazy and breed dependency.
- There are chances that the money will be spent on goods such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs etc.
- Fiscal burden on government would be high. Also, as Economic Survey 2016-17 stated, once implemented, it may become difficult for the government to wind up a UBI in the case of failure.
- The UBI is funded by higher taxes, especially by the indirect taxes, it will result in inflation.

Implementation of basic income will be a serious but manageable challenge.

- It will require goodwill, integrity, knowledge and humility about what will be inevitable mistakes.
- It is essential to obtain local cooperation and awareness at the outset, and the backing of key local institutions.
- With inadequate financial service infrastructure and financial inclusion, it would be difficult for the people to access their benefits.
- Financing the basic income is another challenge. There are chances that UBI would become an add-on to existing subsidies rather than a replacement.

Way forward:

- If properly planned, it is possible to introduce a comprehensive scheme even in rural or urban low-income communities, without too much cost.
- It is strongly recommended that if the government is to go ahead, it should phase in the scheme gradually, rolling it out from low-income to higher-income communities, after local officials have been trained and prepared.
- It is also recommended that the authorities should not select particular types of individuals and give it only to them. It is tempting to say it should go only to women, low-income farmers, or vulnerable social groups. That would be wrong. It would involve expensive and corruptible procedures, and risk evoking resentment in those arbitrarily excluded, who would probably be equally in need, perhaps more so.

- If money is given only to women, men will demand a share; some women will give in, some will resist; it will be divisive. It was found in the pilots that if men and women all have an equal individual amount, it promotes better and more equal gender relations. Moreover, giving to all in the community fosters solidarity within households and the wider community, apart from enabling multiplier effects in the local economy.
- India has the technological capacity, the financial resources, and the need for a simple, transparent basic income scheme. And now is a moment of transformative potential in the country.

38. Start-up challenges

Context

- According to a report by citizens' engagement forum LocalCircles, A large number of start-ups, small and medium enterprises view corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies, securing loans as well as funding as major challenges in 2019
- The report was based on responses from over 15,000 start-ups, SMEs and entrepreneurs

Details

- Corruption or bureaucratic inefficiencies as the top challenge, followed by securing loans and funding (37%), and business growth (18%).
- Angel tax continued to be a key pain point for start-ups, where the assessing officers in many cases reject the valuation method used by the start-up and instead treat the capital raised as income from other sources, thereby, raising a tax demand and penalty on the start-up.

Solutions

- Startups have continued to receive I-T notices in 2018, which was at a similar level as 2017, which reveals that there was no significant improvement on the taxation front.
- There was an urgent need for the income tax authorities to be educated on startup valuations.

39. Justice delayed is markets stymied

Background

- Since the 1991 economic reforms, India has improved tremendously in almost all economic indicators, and is now one of the fastest growing nations in the world.
- Various economic policies of the current government have enabled the economy to move faster than ever before.
- These include tax reforms leading to the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, reforms making India more competitive in the 'Ease of Doing Business' index, and implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

Role of Govt in dispute resolution

- Three things are crucial for the market economy to function efficiently:
 - * transparency in information,
 - * efficient dispute settlements,
 - * Contract enforcement in a time-bound manner powered by an effective judiciary.
- In a market economy, the government has little role to play in transactions among players. However, it plays an effective role by setting up efficient dispute settlement mechanisms, so that the costs of transactions are minimal.

Concerns

- It has now become very important to strengthen the quality of the material which makes up the engine of the economy, i.e. India's institutions.
- As a democracy, India has an advantage: the roots of all its institutions are strong. However, they have simply failed to grow with the growing population and with increasing demands.
- The judicial system, in particular, is far from reaching the pace required for efficient functioning. In such an economy, the judiciary plays the pivotal role by enforcing contracts in the case of disputes through minimal costs.
 - * Over the years, and with the advent of the Internet, India has taken a leap towards transparency of information.
 - * However, little progress has been made in the case of dispute settlement mechanisms due to an inefficient judiciary.
 - * The situation is so desperate that the Economic Survey of 2017-18 had to set aside an entire chapter on the need for 'Timely Justice'.
- Judicial delay hampers dispute resolution and contract enforcement, which discourages investments, stalls projects, hampers tax collections and increases legal costs

Some Stats

- It noted that the current working capacity of the High Courts and the Supreme Court is only 63.6%. Plus, there are huge numbers of pending cases: 1.8 lakh in six of the major tribunals, and close to 3.5 million in the High Courts.
- For economic cases, the average duration of pendency is about 4.3 years for the five major High Courts.
- The Centre and the States approximately spend 0.08-0.09% of the GDP on administration of justice, which is very low. In 2017, India spent about ₹0.24 per person on the judiciary; the U.S. spent ₹12.

- Even though, understandably, it is a little punitive to compare India's budget with that of the most powerful economy in the world, the point is to set out a benchmark for India.

Judicial inaction results in corruption

- Unlike our policymakers, those in other countries seem to have realised the importance of the judiciary in the efficient functioning of a market economy.
- The low focus on the judiciary obviously implies that non-compliance of contracts is not at all costly in India.
- The official dispute settlement mechanism does not deliver justice in a time-bound manner. Consequently, players are willing to bypass the system by paying rents to government officials, a system that became customary in the License Raj.
- Officials are willing to accept quick money since there is little chance of getting caught, making venality a norm.

Way forward

- On the judicial front, Building capacity in lower judiciary so that lower courts can deal with economic and commercial cases, and allowing high courts to focus on streamlining and clarifying questions of law.
 - * Downsizing or removing original and commercial jurisdiction of high courts, and enabling the lower judiciary to deal with such cases.
- Another idea could be the formation of more subject- and stage-specific benches in the Supreme Court as it would result in specialization in combating pendency and delay.
- Improving courts' case management and automation systems would also lead to reduction in judicial delays.
- Therefore having a strong institutional mechanism is important for India. Opposition has a major role to play in the solidification of institutions, including, and especially, the judiciary.
- Strong institutions are the key to move India up the economic ladder. Otherwise, India will remain a land of crony capitalists.

40. Vijay Mallya becomes first person to be declared 'fugitive economic offender'**Background**

- Mallya had left the country in 2016 after he was accused of defaulting on loan payments amounting to thousands of crores.
- In March 2018, the Ministry of External Affairs stated that over 30 businessmen, under investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate, had fled the country to avoid facing prosecution by Indian courts.

Why was it required?

- The presence of various laws which existed to deal with offences related to fraud, counterfeiting, money-laundering and other economic offences, it observed that a new legal framework was required as the current civil and criminal laws do not contain specific provisions to deal with such offenders who fled the country to evade justice.
- Such cases were also observed to be time-consuming and the time taken to deal with such cases affected the financial health of the banks involved.
- It is, therefore, felt necessary to provide an effective, expeditious and constitutionally permissible deterrent to ensure that such actions are curbed.

Who is a Fugitive economic offender?

- A Fugitive Economic Offender is a person
 - * against whom an arrest warrant has been issued
 - * in respect of a scheduled offence and
 - * Who has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or being abroad, refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution.
- A scheduled offence refers to a list of economic offences contained in the Schedule of this act.

Features of the act

- the law applies to somebody against whom there is an arrest warrant issued for offences where the value exceeds Rs 100 crore
 - * who has exited the country and refuses to return to face criminal proceedings
- In order to declare a person a FEO, the agency will have to file an application in a special court and attach the details of all the property to be confiscated.
 - * The application will contain the reasons to believe that an individual is a fugitive economic offender.
 - * This includes not just the properties directly owned by the FEO and affiliated organisations but also any and all benami properties owned by the offender.
- Upon receiving the application, the special court will issue a notice to the individual, requiring him to appear at a specified place within six weeks. If the person appears at the specified place, the special court will terminate its proceedings under the provisions.
- Appeals against the orders of the special court will lie before the High Court.
- Under the Act and upon declaration as FEO, the properties and assets may be confiscated and vested by the Centre.

- The FEO is also immediately barred from filing or defending any civil claim, even those that have nothing to do with their economic offences. They are disallowed from approaching the court to seek any legal remedy or to defend themselves in a case where they may have been wrongfully charged.

Impact:

- The Bill is expected to re-establish the rule of law with respect to the fugitive economic offenders as they would be forced to return to India to face trial for scheduled offences.
- This would also help the banks and other financial institutions to achieve higher recovery from financial defaults committed by such fugitive economic offenders, improving the financial health of such institutions.
- It is expected that the special forum to be created for expeditious confiscation of the proceeds of crime, in India or abroad, would coerce the fugitive to return to India to submit to the jurisdiction of Courts in India to face the law in respect of scheduled offences.

Issue Area

- FEO may not be reviewed as consistent with the basic tenets of natural justice. The provision of selling the property on mere declaration of a person as a fugitive economic offender, without a proper trial violates this principle of 'innocent until proven guilty'.
 - * Hear the other party, or the rule of fair hearing, or the rule that no one should be condemned unheard.
- From the provision in the Code of Criminal Procedure for attachment of the property of 'proclaimed offenders', to sections in Acts targeting smugglers, foreign exchange offenders and traffickers in narcotics, proceedings for forfeiture of property have been marked by shortcomings and procedural delays.
- Experience has shown that disposal of confiscated assets is not easy, especially at a price sufficient to recoup losses or pay off all creditors.
- Under the act confiscation is not limited to the proceeds of crime, and extends to any asset owned by an offender, including benami property. Such clauses are liable for legal challenge, especially if there are third party interests and doubts about real ownership.
- Similarly, while Special Courts may order the confiscation of an offender's property located abroad, there's very little reason for the country where the property is located to comply with any request made about it.
 - * Even after convictions in India, those countries aren't willing to allow us to seize those assets – improving this requires improving our relations with foreign countries and international arrangements, not new overzealous domestic laws.

- Why not structure the banking mechanism? Why let go these offenders from our land? Why not have expedition from those countries? These are again unanswered.

Way Forward

- While the utility and effectiveness of laws are best assessed in the implementation, it is important to ensure they are fair and reasonable. The shortcomings in previous laws must be avoided, and the new legal regime impartially enforced.

41. Panel pulls up govt. for diverting coal cess

Context:

- The 42nd standing committee on energy in its report on stressed gas-based power plants tabled in Parliament has pulled up the government for diverting coal cess to compensate States for revenue loss post-GST, and recommended financial support to the stressed gas-based power projects in the country from National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF).

About NCEF

- Through Finance Bill 2010-11 a corpus called National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF) was created out of cess on coal produced/imported ("polluter pays" principle) for the purposes of financing and promoting clean energy initiatives, funding research in the area of clean energy or for any other purpose relating thereto. Subsequently, the scope of the fund has been expanded to include clean environment initiatives also.
- The projects include innovative schemes like Green Energy Corridor for boosting up the transmission sector, Namami Gange, Green India Mission, Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission (JNNSM)'s installation of solar photovoltaic (SPV) lights and small capacity lights, installation of SPV water pumping systems, SPV Power Plants, Grid Connected Rooftop SPV Power Plants, pilot project to assess wind power potential, etc.

Recommendations of the committee:

- It recommended that financial support be extended to gas-based power projects from the NCEF. The Ministry of Power should pursue this matter with the Ministry of Finance, said the panel.
- The committee said that the fund should be used to support clean energy initiatives and it should not be diverted to compensate GST losses.

42. Govt. plans technology centres for MSMEs

Context:

- 20 technology centres, along with extension centres across the country will be developed by The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) in another 3-5 years.

What are technology centres?

- Technology Centres are collaborative entities established and led by industry. They are resourced by highly-qualified researchers associated with research institutions who are empowered to undertake market focused strategic R&D for the benefit of industry.
- They have modern technology machinery and testing equipment and the services are offered to industries at a competitive price.
- With the development of technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality, the manufacturing units in the MSME sector will have access to these.
- The Ministry is creating trained manpower in virtual reality through the National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC). It has also developed training modules that use virtual reality and these will be launched across the country through the NSIC in a couple of months.

43. Shape of the slowdown (Chinese Economy Slowdown)

- China's growth is slowing down. China, the world's second-largest economy, has reported that its exports for December 2018 fell by 4.4%, the sharpest fall in two years amidst rising trade tensions with the United States and fears of a global economic slowdown.
- Further, China's trade surplus with the U.S. has increased to \$323 billion, its highest level since 2016 and up 17% from a year ago. This is likely to put added pressure on Chinese exports to the U.S.
- Besides, China's factory activity contracted to a two-year low by the end of December 2018 while car sales in 2018 dropped for the first time since 1990, pointing to faltering demand from Chinese consumers.
- There are increasing fears that the Chinese government may further drop its growth target to 6% in 2019, from 6.5% in 2018.
- Given its implications for global growth, markets across the world have naturally been worried about the fate of the Chinese economy.
- China's stock market, in particular, was the worst-performing among major economies in the year 2018.
- Apple, Jaguar Land Rover and other companies have warned of weak earnings due to a slowdown in their sales in China.
- Responding to fears of a serious slowdown in the economy, the People's Bank of China on 16th January, 2019 injected cash worth \$83 billion into the economy through open market operations in order to boost bank lending and overall economic growth. It is believed that the Chinese government may be prepping for a stimulus worth trillions of yuans to step up spending in the economy.

Concluding Remarks:

- China has been struggling to transition from its earlier growth model led by cheap exports and huge capital investments into a more domestic consumption-led economy.
- In particular, the government and the central bank have in recent years tried to wean the economy off cheap debt that fuelled its impressive growth run.
- The Chinese central bank fully opened the credit taps of the economy in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis that threatened to derail growth.
- However, even as it tries to steer the economy towards more consumption-led growth, the state has been wary of allowing economic sectors like real estate that were earlier boosted by the availability of cheap credit to go bust.
- A true restructuring of its export- and state-led economic model will not be possible until China allows the liquidation of uneconomical projects that were begun only because of the availability of ample amounts of cheap credit. This will be the first step towards building a more market-driven economy.
- Currently, it is not clear whether China is willing to bite the bullet and stop feeding its economy with cheap credit.
- China may be tempted to go further and look at socialising the losses coming from defaults on business loans. None of this will be good for the long-term health of the Chinese or the global economy.

44. RBI eases norms for external commercial borrowing**Context:**

- In a bid to improve ease of doing business, the Reserve Bank of India has decided to liberalise external commercial borrowing (ECB) norms, allowing all companies that are eligible for receiving foreign direct investment, to raise funds through the ECB route.
- The list of eligible borrowers has been expanded. All entities eligible to receive foreign direct investment can borrow under the ECB framework. The new framework takes immediate effect.
- The RBI has decided to keep the minimum average maturity period at 3 years for all ECBs, irrespective of the amount of borrowing, except for borrowers specifically permitted to borrow for a shorter period. Earlier, the minimum average maturity period was five years. The ceiling for borrowing remains at \$750 million.

External Commercial Borrowings or ECBs

- ECB is the financial instrument used to borrow money from the foreign sources of financing to invest in the commercial activities of the domestic country. Simply, borrowing money from the non-resident lenders and investing it in the commercial activities of India is called as external commercial borrowings.

- External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) includes commercial bank loans, buyers' credit, suppliers' credit, securitized instruments such as Floating Rate Notes and Fixed Rate Bonds etc.,
- ECBs are being permitted by the Government as a source of finance for Indian Corporate for expansion of existing capacity as well as for fresh investment.
- ECBs provide opportunity to borrow large volume of funds. The funds are available for relatively long term. Interest rate are also lower compared to domestic funds
- ECBs are in the form of foreign currencies. Hence, they enable the corporate to have foreign currency to meet the import of machineries etc.
- Corporate can raise ECBs from internationally recognised sources such as banks, export credit agencies, international capital markets etc.
- The ECBs have emerged as a major form of foreign capital called as FDI. PSUs and corporate use this ECB as a major platform for the source of investment

Pune-Secunderabad Shatabdi is India's cleanest train

- The results of the first-ever 'Total Cleanliness Survey' of the Railways are now out, and the winners are North Western Railway (NWR), which topped the zonal rankings in the 'Premium' category trains, and Southern Railway, which came out on top in the 'Other than Premium' category' trains.
- The cleanliness survey covered 209 trains and was conducted by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) through two professional agencies. The survey's stated aim was to assess the progress of the 'Swachh Rail-Swachh Bharat' mission and promote healthy competition among trains.
- While the NWR recorded an average score of 860 out of 1,000 in the 'Premium' category, South Central Railway finished at the bottom with an average score of 658. Southern Railway topped the 'Other than Premium' category, recording the highest average score of 736 among the 16 railway zones, while the East Central Railway was the dirtiest in this group, with an average score of 572.
- The 'Premium' trains included the Rajdhani, Shatabdi, Duronto, Tejas and Gatiman while Sampark Kranti, Intercity, Jan Shatabdi and other Mail and Express trains were grouped under the 'Other than Premium' category.
- Opinion of on-board passengers was sought on the state of toilets, housekeeping, linen and general cleanliness, with the rating options ranging from 1 to 5.

45. E-comm talks: India must stand firm

Editorial Analysis:

- In a show of strength, on the last day of the annual World Economic Forum meeting, nearly 70 countries, including China, issued a joint statement confirming their intention to commence WTO negotiations on trade-related aspects of electronic commerce.
- Speaking at the same platform a day earlier, Shinzo Abe, Japan's Prime Minister, announced that he would "set in train a new track for looking at data governance — call it the Osaka Track — under the roof of the WTO".

What are the implications of these developments for India, one of the largest economies that chose to stay away from the joint statement on electronic commerce?

- At the outset, it is important to understand what the oligarchs of the digital world are seeking through the WTO negotiations on digital economy and e-commerce. First, they want to have access to free and unrestricted flow of data — the raw material that fuels their business.
- Their principal targets are large developing countries, such as China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and South Africa, which generate large volumes of digital data.
- Second, they seek to curtail the role of governments in regulating almost all key aspects of the digital economy. Third, they want to leverage the negotiation to reduce their cost of doing business and enhance their incomes, including, by prohibiting countries from imposing taxes on them and on their products.

On e-commerce, what exactly is happening at the WTO?

- Over the past three years, there has been an aggressive push by the developed countries to initiate negotiations aimed at finalizing binding rules on different dimensions of the digital economy.
- The digital giants have managed to disguise their deep commercial interests and have succeeded in projecting these negotiations as being beneficial for developing countries.
- Swayed by their narrative of "e-commerce for development", many developing countries have joined the chorus for seeking negotiations on this issue.
- However, prominent countries including India, Indonesia and most of the countries in Africa are firmly opposed to these negotiations, especially on the issue of cross-border data flows.

Plurilateral negotiation:

- On account of the stiff opposition from some developing countries, the proponents have failed to secure a mandate to negotiate multilateral rules on e-commerce at the WTO. Consequently, they have changed track and are now actively seeking to initiate negotiations among a group of willing countries — commonly referred to as plurilateral negotiations.

- However, even for a plurilateral agreement on e-commerce to become a part of the WTO, it would require consensus of the entire membership, including countries not part of the plurilateral group.

Why has India wisely chosen not to align itself with the proponents of e-commerce?

- At the core of India's approach on this issue lies the reality that the country would be one of the largest creators of data in the world. This advantage can be leveraged to nurture its domestic digital economy so that it acquires a share in the digital economy commensurate with its status as a significant global source of data.
- On the other hand, if India is compelled by any future agreement at the WTO to allow unrestricted free flow of data across borders, then its ambition in the high-value digital segment would take a hit. In such a scenario, the country would be unable to monetise the raw material of the digital economy and would be reduced to becoming merely a consumer of digital products.

Moving ahead from Davos, what challenges would India face in respect of e-commerce negotiations at the WTO?

- With the weight of more than 70 countries behind the plurilateral initiative and the joint statement at Davos, India is likely to come under intense pressure from different directions to join the e-commerce negotiations.
- Given Abe's statement about Osaka Track on data governance, negotiations on e-commerce at the WTO is likely to be the foremost item on the agenda of the leaders, when they meet later this year, during the last week of June, in Osaka for the G20 Summit. At this meeting, Abe and leaders of some developed countries would seek to persuade India's Prime Minister to join the WTO negotiations.
- As part of the preparations for this important meeting, various ministries in India, including the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and the Ministry of External Affairs need to work in tandem. The country must not feel apologetic during the G20 leaders' summit in defending its interest in the digital economy by refusing to sign on to WTO negotiations on this issue.

Pressure from domestic lobbies

- Domestically, we are likely to see lobby groups and experts lament that by staying out of the negotiations on e-commerce, India is missing out an opportunity to influence the rules that may get finalised.
- This commonly heard sentiment totally ignores the reality, and past experience, at the negotiating table. On issues of their deep interest, it is the developed countries that inevitably write the core rules. The influence of developing countries has been limited to fighting for some exceptions. Even if we do not like it, this stark reality needs to be acknowledged.

- Further, there is hardly any issue in e-commerce negotiations, on which India may stand to gain. Instead, its participation would be more about limiting the damage that might arise from binding rules in this area.
- Further, experts have opined that given the mood of the proponents, it is unlikely that they will accommodate any development concerns of India.
- In short, even if the country is inside the negotiating room, it is unlikely to wield any meaningful influence on the final rules.
- Some lobby groups in India, with one foot in the developed world, are seeking to create a narrative that prospects of exports of IT and IT-enabled services would improve on account of e-commerce negotiations at the WTO.
- Without any detailed examination, some in the government appear to have accepted this narrative. If the text of e-commerce provisions in some of the existing free trade agreements are an indicator, then there is unlikely to be any gain for India's IT and ITES exports from e-commerce rules at the WTO.

Concluding Remarks:

- In conclusion, let us bear in mind that no nation can prosper if it hands over its raw material to other countries for free.
- This is precisely what would be required of India if it becomes a party to an agreement on e-commerce at the WTO.
- If the country has to benefit from opportunities in the digital world, then the entire government must speak in one voice and act coherently at multiple international platforms and protect national interest. Failure to do so would compromise our digital future.

46. Removing the roots of farmers' distress – On agrarian distress

Issue:

Recently, there has been active discussion on the strategies addressing farm distress.

- Agrarian distress, mainly in terms of low agricultural prices and, consequently, poor farm incomes.
- Low productivity in agriculture and related supply-side factors are the major concerns.
- An issue that is connected is the declining average size of farm holdings and the viability of this size for raising farm incomes.

Possible solutions:

1. Prices and incomes

- Prices play a key role in affecting the incomes of farmers. Even during the Green Revolution, along with technology and associated packages, price factor was considered important.
- In the last two years, inflation in agriculture was much lower than overall inflation.

- * The implicit price deflator for Gross Value Added (GVA) in agriculture was 1.1% while it was 3.2% for total GVA in 2017-18.
- * The advance estimates for 2018-19 show that the implicit deflator for GVA in agriculture is 0%, and 4.8% for total GVA.
- * Agriculture GVA growth was at 3.8% for both nominal prices and constant prices in 2018-19, giving the price deflator of 0%.

- The consumer price index (CPI) also shows that the rise in prices for agriculture was much lower than general inflation in recent years.
- Market prices for several agricultural commodities have been lower than those of minimum support prices (MSP).
- All these trends show the terms of trade to be moving against agriculture in the last two years.

Why is there a decline in market prices?

- When output increases well beyond the market demand at a price remunerative to producers, market prices decline.
- And in the absence of an effective price support policy, farmers are faced with a loss in income, depending on how much the price decline is. The 'farm distress' in recent years has been partly on account of this situation, as the loss of income is beyond the ability, particularly of small farmers, to absorb.
- In a strange way, an increasing production has resulted in this adverse consequence. (When the supply exceeds demand, there will be a fall in market prices).

What are possible solutions?

A few schemes have been suggested to address the problem of managing declining output prices when output increases significantly.

- Price deficiency compensation: is one such mechanism which amounts to paying the difference between market price and the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- Open procurement system: is at the other extreme, which has been in vogue quite effectively in the case of rice and wheat. Under this system, procurement is open ended at the MSP. Whatever foodgrains are offered by the farmers, within the stipulated procurement period and which conforms to the quality specifications prescribed by Government of India, are purchased at MSP (and bonus/incentive, if any) by the Government agencies.
- Limited procurement for price stabilisation: A 'price deficiency' scheme may compensate farmers when prices decrease below a certain specified level. However, market prices may continue to fall as supply exceeds 'normal demand'.

- Under this scheme, the government will procure the 'excess', leaving the normal production level to clear the market at a remunerative price. Thus, procurement will continue until the market price rises to touch the MSP.
- This is a middle way that could be effective in some crops.
- The suggested 'limited procurement system' will not work if the MSP is fixed at a level to which the market price will never rise. The government can sell the procured grain in later years or use them in welfare programmes.

Need for sustainable solutions:

- Agricultural markets have witnessed only limited reforms. They are characterised by inefficient physical operations, excessive crowding of intermediaries, and fragmented market chains. Due to this, farmers are deprived of a fair share of the price paid by final consumers. States have also not shown any urgency in reforming agricultural markets. For better price for farmers, agriculture has to go beyond farming and develop a value chain comprising farming, wholesaling, warehousing, logistics, processing and retailing.
- Some States have introduced farm support schemes such as the Rythu Bandhu Scheme (Telangana) and the Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme (Odisha). Basically, these schemes are income support schemes which will be in operation year after year.
- Raising the MSP, price deficiency payments or income support schemes can only be a partial solution to the problem of providing remunerative returns to farmers.
- A sustainable solution is market reforms to enable better price discovery combined with long-term trade policies favourable to exports.
- The creation of a competitive, stable and unified national market is needed for farmers to get better prices.

Low productivity

- The next issue is the low productivity of Indian agriculture. Basics such as seeds, fertilizers, credit, land and water management and technology are important and should not be forgotten.
- Investment in infrastructure and research and development are needed.
- Basically, it is not investment alone but efficiency in water management in both canal and groundwater that is important.
- Water is the leading input in agriculture. More than 60% of irrigation water is consumed by two crops: rice and sugar cane. India uses upto three times the water used to produce one tonne of grain in countries such as Brazil, China and the U.S. This implies that water-use efficiency can be improved significantly with better use of technologies that include drip irrigation.

- Yields of several crops are lower in India when compared to several other countries. Technology can help to reduce 'yield gaps' and thus improve productivity.
- Government policies have been biased towards cereals particularly rice and wheat. There is a need to make a shift from rice and wheat-centric policies to millets, pulses, fruits, vegetables, livestock and fish.

Land size:

- Another major issue relates to the shrinking size of farms which is also responsible for low incomes and farmers' distress.
 - * The average size of farm holdings declined from 2.3 hectares in 1970-71 to 1.08 hectares in 2015-16.
 - * The share of small and marginal farmers increased from 70% in 1980-81 to 86% in 2015-16.
 - * The monthly income of small and marginal farmers from all sources is only around Rs. 4,000 and Rs. 5,000 as compared to Rs. 41,000 for large farmers.
- Thus, the viability of marginal and small farmers is a major challenge for Indian agriculture.
- Many small farmers cannot leave agriculture because of a lack of opportunities in the non-farm sector. They can get only partial income from the non-farm sector. In this context, a consolidation of land holdings becomes important to raise farmer incomes.
- In the context of rural poverty, B.S. Minhas had argued even in the 1970s that compulsory consolidation of land holdings alongside land development activities could enhance the incomes/livelihoods of the poor in rural areas. Unfortunately, there is little discussion now on land fragmentation and consolidation of farm holdings.
- We need to have policies for land consolidation along with land development activities in order to tackle the challenge of the low average size of holdings.
- Farmers can voluntarily come together and pool land to gain the benefits of size. Through consolidation, farmers can reap the economies of scale both in input procurement and output marketing.

Conclusion:

- To conclude, farmers' distress is due to low prices and low productivity. Limited procurement, measures to improve low productivity, and consolidation of land holdings to gain the benefits of size, can help in reducing agrarian distress. There has to be a long-term policy to tackle the situation.

47. **Shot in the arm (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code)**

Larger Background:

- The 'Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016' is considered as the biggest economic reform next only to GST. The Lok Sabha had earlier passed the Bill on 5th May, 2016.
- In India, the legal and institutional machinery for dealing with debt default has not been in line with global standards. The recovery action by creditors, either through the Contract Act or through special laws such as the Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 and the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, has not had desired outcomes. Similarly, action through the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act, 1985 and the winding up provisions of the Companies Act, 1956 have neither been able to aid recovery for lenders nor aid restructuring of firms. Laws dealing with individual insolvency, the Presidential Towns insolvency Act, 1909 and the Provincial Insolvency Act, 1920, are almost a century old. This has hampered the confidence of the lender. When lenders are unconfident, debt access for borrowers is diminished. This reflects in the state of the credit markets in India. Secured credit by banks is the largest component of the credit market in India.
- The law aims to consolidate the laws relating to insolvency of companies and limited liability entities (including limited liability partnerships and other entities with limited liability), unlimited liability partnerships and individuals, presently contained in a number of legislations, into a single legislation.
- Such consolidation will provide for a greater clarity in law and facilitate the application of consistent and coherent provisions to different stakeholders affected by business failure or inability to pay debt.

The salient features of the law are as follows:

- i- Clear, coherent and speedy process for early identification of financial distress and resolution of companies and limited liability entities if the underlying business is found to be viable.
- ii- Two distinct processes for resolution of individuals, namely- "Fresh Start" and "Insolvency Resolution".
- iii- Debt Recovery Tribunal and National Company Law Tribunal to act as Adjudicating Authority and deal with the cases related to insolvency, liquidation and bankruptcy process in respect of individuals and unlimited partnership firms and in respect of companies and limited liabilities entities respectively.
- iv- Establishment of an Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India to exercise regulatory oversight over insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities.

- v- Insolvency professionals would handle the commercial aspects of insolvency resolution process. Insolvency professional agencies will develop professional standards, code of ethics and be first level regulator for insolvency professionals members leading to development of a competitive industry for such professionals.
- vi- Information utilities would collect, collate, authenticate and disseminate financial information to be used in insolvency, liquidation and bankruptcy proceedings.
- vii- Enabling provisions to deal with cross border insolvency.

Editorial Analysis:

- The recent Supreme Court's judgment upholding the validity of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 (IBC) in its "entirety" could have a major impact on the country's economic landscape.
- Experts have pointed out that the fledgling IBC has been severely tested in the two years since its enactment, with the Centre being forced to amend a couple of its provisions in order to plug some loopholes that enabled defaulting borrowers to challenge the legislation.
- Any law of this nature that takes over businesses and assets from defaulters and empowers lenders to change the management is bound to face legal challenges. Borrowers were never going to take the IBC lying down, and that is exactly what happened; over the last two years, they have challenged various aspects of the law in tribunals and courts. In the event, the apex court's stamp of approval on the entire Code is a strong signal to borrowers and banks even as it brings a sense of relief to the Centre, which has been watching one of its better economic initiatives being stifled by vested interests.

Challenges mounted against the IBC:

- One of the major challenges mounted against the IBC was by operational creditors, who are owed money by the company in the normal course of operations for supply of goods and services.
- In the payment waterfall prescribed under Section 53 of the IBC in the event of liquidation of the company or its sale to another entity, their dues rank below those of financial creditors, workmen and employees.
- This was challenged by the operational creditors, who wanted equal treatment with financial creditors in the waterfall mechanism. Several landmark cases that were referred to the National Company Law Tribunal under the IBC remain stuck there, including that of the high-profile Essar Steel, as a result of its operational creditors seeking equal treatment.
- With the Supreme Court now ruling that there are "intelligible differentia" between operational and financial creditors, an avenue that defaulters used to stymie proceedings has been closed.

- It is important to note that repayment of financial debt by borrowers infuses capital into the economy as lenders can on-lend the money that has been repaid to other entrepreneurs, thus aiding economic activity, the judges observed.
- The apex court has also clarified that a mere relationship with an ineligible person cannot disqualify someone from becoming a bidder for a troubled asset. It has to be proved that such a person is “connected” with the business activity of the resolution applicant.

Concluding Remarks:

- The court used strong words: “...The experiment conducted in enacting the Code is proving to be largely successful. The defaulter’s paradise is lost.”
- Experts opine that this constitutes a clear signal of its backing for the IBC which, despite all the challenges that it has faced, has been successful in sending a message to recalcitrant defaulters that there can be no more business-as-usual when they default.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Agreement on Prohibition of Attacks against Nuclear

Installations and Facilities

- The agreement was signed on 31 December 1988 and entered into force on 27 January 1991, provides, inter alia, that the two countries inform each other of nuclear installations and facilities to be covered under the Agreement on the first of January of every calendar year.
- It was signed by the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan
- This Agreement bars both the countries from attacking each other's atomic facilities or assisting any foreign country to attack each other on each other's nuclear installations.
- The agreement provides a confidence-building security measure environment and refrained each party from "undertaking, encouraging, or participating in, directly or indirectly, any action aimed at causing destruction or damage to any nuclear installation or facility in each country"
- The term "nuclear installation or facility" includes nuclear power and research reactors, fuel fabrication, uranium enrichment, isotopes separation and reprocessing facilities as well as any other installations with fresh or irradiated nuclear fuel and materials in any form and establishments storing significant quantities of radio-active materials.
- This reaffirms the commitment to durable peace and the development of friendly and harmonious bilateral relations

Agreement on Prisoners

The two countries also exchanged details of civilian prisoners and fishermen lodged in each other's jails.

- The agreement on prisoners, which was signed on May 31, 2008, provides that a comprehensive list of nationals of each country lodged in other country's jails has to be exchanged twice each year, on January 1 and July 1 while the list of nuclear installations is exchanged only on January 1.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India handed over to Pakistan a lists of 249 Pakistani civilian prisoners and 98 fishermen in its custody.
- Pakistan gave India lists of 54 civilian prisoners and 483 fishermen in its custody, who are Indians or are believed-to-be-Indians.

Context

- India and Pakistan exchanged for the 28th consecutive year a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral agreement

2. American pullout from Afghanistan

Background

- U.S. has fought that longest war in Afghanistan, that began as revenge for the 9/11 attacks, evolved into a mission for ensuring democracy and prosperity in Afghanistan.
- In recent years, challenged by the resurgence of the Taliban, it has now become a mission mainly to ensure an honourable exit.
- Experts further point out that this isn't the first time the U.S. has sought to do this: President Barack Obama had faced similar challenges in 2010, just before he announced the big drawdown.
- The Trump administration has decided to withdraw roughly 7,000 troops from Afghanistan.
- This decision will have major consequences for peace in Afghanistan and the neighborhood, which may result into Chaos, a gradual descent into a civil war is likely as various regional stakeholders try to reshape the battlefield in accordance with their own strategic priorities counting on American forces to eventually leave

Concerns for India

The Taliban now controls, or actively contests, the government's control, in around 45 per cent of Afghanistan's territory. The Afghan security forces are taking heavy casualties, losing on an average, 30-40 members every day. Important urban centres like Ghazni have been taken over by the Taliban, for days

- A swift military takeover by the Taliban would raise security concerns in India, given the past Taliban role in colluding with the hijackers of IC 814.
- The Taliban has also provided training facilities and bases for terrorist groups like the Jaish-e-Mohammed, which was responsible for the attack on India's Parliament.

India's Current Approach has been of Soft Power in Afghanistan

- India has certainly contributed much ranging from telecommunications to education, Bollywood movies and pop music.
- The building for the National Assembly was built with Indian assistance to support Afghanistan's democracy.
- Indian reconstruction largesse, amounting to some \$3 billion, has earned it goodwill and popularity.

What can be India's approach?**1. Engage with the Taliban:**

- One thing that should already have been done and must be done is to engage in dialogue with the Taliban. There is no doubt that the Taliban will be a major player in the politics of Afghanistan in the coming months and years. They already control more than 50% of the country and are getting stronger and bolder by the day.
 - * They are also engaged in direct talks with China, Russia, the Central Asian states and others.
 - * The Americans have also begun sustained dialogue with the Taliban.
 - * The Taliban have refused to talk to the Kabul government so far, but as and when the Americans pull out, as they are justified in doing for reasons of their own national interest, they might agree to engage with the Ashraf Ghani government.
- In any future scenario, the Taliban are guaranteed to play an important, perhaps even a decisive role in the governing structures of the country.
- New Delhi has so far refrained from establishing formal contacts with the Taliban out of sensitivity for the Kabul government not wanting to talk directly to the Taliban as long as the Taliban refuse to acknowledge its legitimacy.
- Even Iran, a Shia regime, has established official dialogue with the Taliban, a staunchly Sunni movement.
 - * It would not be difficult for our agencies to establish contacts that would facilitate initiating an official dialogue with Taliban; if needed, Iran could help in this even if it might displease the Americans.
 - * After all, the Americans have not always been sensitive to our concerns, in Afghanistan or elsewhere and Mr. Trump has publicly shown unawareness of our substantial development assistance to it.

2. Promotion of regional compact among the neighbouring countries:

- The international community needs to think of how to establish a mechanism which might offer a reasonable opportunity to the Afghan people to live in peace, free from external interference.
- Perhaps the only way in which this could be done is to promote a regional compact among all the neighbouring countries as well as relevant external powers, and with the endorsement of the UN Security Council, to commit themselves not to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs.
- India will need to talk to China about cooperating in Afghanistan; Chinese President and Indian Prime Minister already agreed in Wuhan, in April 2018, on working on joint projects there.

- Pakistan is highly suspicious of India's role in Afghanistan. A multilateral pact, with India subscribing to it will put to rest, at least to some extent, Pakistan's apprehensions.
 - * Pakistan should have no objection to formally agreeing to Afghanistan's neutrality.
- There is the most relevant precedent of the Bilateral Agreement on the Principles of Mutual Relations, in particular on Non-interference and Non-intervention, signed in Geneva in 1988 between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- In that agreement, the parties undertook, inter alia, to respect the right of the other side to determine its political, social and culture system without interference in any form; to refrain from over throwing or changing the political system of the other side; to ensure that its territory was not used to violate the sovereignty, etc of the other side, to prevent within its territory the training, etc of mercenaries from whatever origin for the purpose of hostile activities against the other side.
- As a document on non-interference, it could hardly be improved upon. Pakistan probably would agree to a document with Afghanistan in whose governance the Taliban will play an important role, which would broadly be similar to the one it had concluded with an Afghan regime which it did not approve of.
- The Bonn Agreement of 2001, which made Hamid Karzai the interim chief of Afghan government, contains a request to the United Nations and the international community to 'guarantee' non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, a request not acted upon so far.

China's Role

- Sharing part of a border with Afghanistan, China has a great interest in its stability.
 - * China would be adversely affected by war and chaos, which could spill over into north-western China, Pakistan, and Central Asia.
 - * As all these areas are vital in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), peace in Afghanistan is critical.
- China has gained considerable economic and diplomatic influence in Afghanistan.
 - * Unsurprisingly, Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani, made China the destination of his first official trip abroad in October 2014.
 - * China then announced its intention to build regional consensus on Afghanistan's security.
- It has joined the U.S. and Russia in several peace talks with the Taliban and is part of the four-nation Quadrilateral Coordination Group (with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the U.S.).

- * It is giving military aid to Afghanistan, with the express intent of fighting terrorism and increasing security cooperation.
- * If the U.S. withdrawal exacerbates conflict, southern Russia will also face the threat of an extremist spillover. Therefore, Russia and its Central Asian 'near abroad' would be willing to expand their cooperation with China to curb insecurity.
- Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which share a border with northern Afghanistan, are concerned about the Taliban and other terrorist groups becoming powerful in Afghanistan, and posing a threat.
 - * The SCO's programme for 2019-21 also calls for combating terrorism, and generally enhancing security cooperation.
- China never had any intention of contributing troops to NATO's anti-Taliban campaign.
 - * But as Asia's strongest power and challenger to the U.S., China will shed no tears if the U.S. reduces its military strength or calls it a day after 18 years of a protracted and indecisive war in Afghanistan.

Economic Role in Afghanistan

- Despite the prevailing instability in Afghanistan, China has used diplomacy and finance to appear influential and generous.
- It has invested in projects such as mining, roads and railways, and health.
 - * A rail link, completed in 2016, and running from far eastern China via Uzbekistan to the river port of Hairatan in northern Afghanistan, could reduce the time taken to make shipments, from six months by road, to just two weeks.
 - * Infrastructure problems have halted work on the railway for a while, and the three countries are in talks to resume operations

China Pakistan Angle

- Pakistan is known to train and export extremists across the Durand Line. The reason for Taliban's resilience is the support and succor it receives from Rawalpindi. Pakistan's leverage in Afghanistan is set to grow.
 - * Pakistan continues to provide the Taliban military and intelligence support, together with safe havens and bases on its soil. The Taliban's Vice-President Sirajuddin Haqqani resides in and operates from Pakistan.
- It is also blamed for exporting extremists to Uighur in Xinjiang, and for extremist attacks on Chinese workers in the CPEC area.

- With China investing billions in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Pakistan being the largest recipient of Chinese arms imports (2013-17), Could China have some leverage over Pakistan? Would China's strategic and economic interests prompt it to press Pakistan to stop exporting terrorists across the Durand Line? These are the big questions.
- On the other side USA can still play a role by asserting its rights from IMF as the Pakistan's economy would collapse without assistance
 - * The US in the past has also linked such assistance to Pakistan, to the ISI ending support for terrorism.

Concerns:

A regional pact on non-interference and non-intervention ought to be welcomed by all the regional states, as:

- Russia has reason to worry about a lack of stability in Afghanistan because of its concerns regarding a spread of radicalism as well as the drug menace.
- China has even stronger concerns, given the situation in its western-most region.
- The U.S. might have apprehensions about China entrenching itself in strategically important Afghanistan, but there is little it can do about it; a regional agreement on non-interference might give the U.S. at least some comfort.

India China Coalition to reduce the growth of Taliban

- The Afghan government would like to see India-China economic cooperation in Afghanistan that could boost progress and enhance human security
- In a first, India and China started a joint training project for Afghan diplomats. They could expand cooperation by facilitating Afghanistan's full membership of the SCO
- China's leadership role of the SCO and contacts with all parties (the U.S., the Taliban, the Afghan government, Pakistan, Russia and the five Central Asian states) could give it a vantage in crafting a regional solution on Afghanistan.

Conclusion:

- It is early days to conclude whether the situation in Afghanistan has entered its end game. In any case, it would be prudent to assume that the U.S. will definitely leave Afghanistan in the next two years, likely to be followed by other western countries.

3. Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA)

Context:

- US President Donald Trump signed this Act which is designed to counter the encroaching influence and growing threat from China and to reinvigorate US leadership in the Indo-Pacific region.

- It allocates a budget of \$1.5 billion over a five-year period to enhance cooperation with America's strategic regional allies in the region.

Details

- The act "establishes a multifaceted U.S. strategy to increase U.S. security, economic interests, and values in the Indo-Pacific region"
- The ARIA includes multiple provisions and largely supports the Trump administration's own National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy documents, both of which have identified the Indo-Pacific as a strategic region of particular priority.
- ARIA draws attention to U.S. relations with China, India, the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Northeast Asian allies Japan and South Korea.
- The law calls for the president to "develop a diplomatic strategy that includes working with United States allies and partners to conduct joint maritime training and freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific region, including the East China Sea and the South China Sea, in support of a rules-based international system benefiting all countries."

Significance

- The law states that US "recognizes the vital role of the strategic partnership between the United States and India in promoting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region" and "calls for strengthening and broadening of diplomatic, economic, and security ties between the United States and India".
- It reiterates US commitment to all "bilateral and security agreements and arrangements" between the two countries, including the New Framework for the United States-India Defense Relationship, and the United States-India Defense Technology and Trade Initiative.

4. Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT)

- The CSAT was established to meet the requirements of the Agreed Memorandum on the Commonwealth Secretariat (1964) which was revised by the governments in 2005.
- CSAT is meant to decide service disputes between the employees of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Secretariat itself
- The CSAT has a full complement of eight members comprising the President and seven others. The members are selected by Commonwealth governments on a regionally representative basis from among persons of high moral character who must hold or have held high judicial office in a Commonwealth country.
- The members are appointed on a four-year term which may be renewed only once.

Contex:

- Justice AK Sikri turns down govt offer to nominate him to Commonwealth Tribunal

5. Hard Power Imperative

Introduction- Insect Allies

- Insect Allies project involves using gene-editing techniques like CRISPR to infect insects with modified viruses that could help crops more resilient.
- It is a program pursuing scalable, readily deployable, and generalizable countermeasures against potential natural and engineered threats to the food supply with the goals of preserving the U.S. crop system.
 - * If a cornfield were hit by an unexpected drought or suddenly exposed to a pathogen, for example, Insect Allies might deploy an army of aphids carrying a genetically modified virus to slow the corn plant's growth rate.
- It was launched by the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which is responsible for developing military technologies in the U.S., researchers have been asked to evolve insects that introduce genetically modified viruses into crops.
- This is being done ostensibly to address infections.

Concerns

One is yet to come across a more clever explanation for a lethal weapon system being developed.

- Imagine these insects being let loose in fields with their genes deviously modified? Is this agricultural warfare?
 - * The journal, Science, acknowledges that the programme "may be widely perceived as an effort to develop biological agents for hostile purposes".
- The DARPA has denied that this is its intention, but history has proven that noble human intentions have been overpowered by the lure of obtaining a technological advantage to enhance power.
- Insects loaded with synthetic viruses will be difficult to control. Therefore, Such action will have profound consequences and could pose a major threat to global biosecurity.
- Even farmers wanted to use genetically modified viruses to improve their crops, there is no reason not to use conventional spraying equipment.
- The Insect Allies Program could be seen to violate the Biological Weapons Convention, if the motivations presented by Darpa are not credible
- The suspicion over development will encourage other nations to develop their own technologies in this area.

Chinese Model or R&D

- No country calling itself a power can afford to lag behind its adversaries in the technology innovation cycle. China realised this early, and its advancements in weapons technology has been impressive.
- With research and development (R&D) allocation growing from \$13.4 billion in 1991 to \$377 billion in 2015 (20% of the world's R&D budget), China moved from an era of reverse engineering to creative adaptations and now to disruptive innovations, as seen in its J-20 stealth fighter and the hypersonic wave rider vehicle programmes.
- On mastering the latter, China would be able to strike any target in the world within an hour of the decision being taken.
- With such technological breakthroughs, and as part of its influence operations, it is no surprise that China is changing rules that govern geopolitical relations.
- Accordingly, it has moved from Deng Xiaoping's philosophy — 'hide your strength and bide your time' — to Xi Jinping's propagation of aggressive aggrandizement.

Delhi Lacks Firepower

- The narrative in Delhi is stuck on the mundane issues of third- and fourth-generation fighter programmes of Tejas and Rafale.
- India seems to hope for an environment sans war. Soft power processes such as the Wuhan summit and the waiver for India under CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) are important but they are not substitutes for the hard power necessary to buttress nation-building.
- China and the U.S. may be adversaries, but economic reasons will not let their rhetoric and mutual trade wars cross the rubicon.
- Promises of friendships between unequal's do not withstand the lure of economic give and take of the powerful engaged in a geo-economic tussles; it is a truism that while capability takes time to build, intentions can change overnight. It is time that India stands on its own with its indigenous hard power.

Adequate budget and time for R&D

- Hard power grows only if there is an adequate budget, and if time is given for acquiring intellectual property in the military.
- According to the World Bank, India's total investment in R&D has stayed static at 0.63% of the GDP for a 20-year period! More worrying is that three-fifth of this is in sectors other than defence.
 - * In the same period, China's R&D investment has gone up from 0.56% to 2.07% of its GDP.

- Reports state that the Indian Air Force has delayed payment to HAL and that the Defence Ministry has not paid military contractors. The scene thus appears grim vis-à-vis monies available for strengthening the war-waging potential of the services.

Conclusion

- Military power does not come with purchase of sniper rifles, the emergency acquisition of which caused euphoria in some circles.
- It is also a fact that, not one election cycle but decades are needed to build military power, which is the life span of at least three governments.
- The rise of Japan's military in the early 19th century, Germany's military between 1920 and 1940, and China's military between 1980 and 2005 attest to decades-long commitment of focussed political and scientific attention and assured availability of adequate monies.
- With the strengthening of China-Pakistan relations, and the modernisation of their militaries, it is vital that India's 2019-20 Budget addresses the need to urgently modernise the armed forces.
- Developing intellectual property through indigenous R&D is key to this endeavour.

6. Henley Passport Index

- It is a global ranking of countries according to the travel freedom for their citizens
- The Henley Passport Index is based on data provided by the International Air Transport Authority (IATA) and covers 199 passports and 227 travel destinations.
- It is updated in real time throughout the year, as and when visa policy changes come into effect.

Ranking

- India jumped two positions from 81st in 2018 to 79th in 2019.
- Japan retained its top spot as the world's most travel-friendly passport due to the document's access to 190 countries
- Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal ranked further low at 104, 102 and 94 respectively.
- South Korea edged up the ranking from October's index to join Singapore, offering access to 189 jurisdictions.
- China jumped almost 20 places in just two years, from 85th in 2017 to 69th this year.

7. Huawei's CFO is arrested in Canada for 'violating U.S. sanctions on Iran'**Context**

- Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer for Huawei, was arrested in Vancouver

- She is facing extradition to the United States for allegedly violating sanctions against Iran

USA's charges

- China, along with Russia, has long been suspect in the eyes of the West for spying, the basis for this being proven instances of online attacks and unestablished cases of breaches in western computer systems.
 - * In the case of Huawei, the western line is that as it is a corporation close to the Chinese establishment, its activities cannot be purely technological and commercial.
 - * Western governments have long been wary of Huawei, which was founded by Ren Zhengfei, a former People's Liberation Army soldier. The USA feels that the company may use espionage electronic chips which may be a threat to its internal security.
- The specific charge against Huawei is that in every piece of hardware sold by it, there are microchips and devices that provide substantial information to the Chinese authorities.
- U.S. authorities have been probing Huawei since at least 2016 for allegedly shipping U.S.-origin products to Iran and other countries in violation of U.S. export and sanctions laws
- Previously, Chinese telecom giant ZTE reached a settlement with the U.S. government over charges of exporting banned items to Iran.
- Beijing's "Made in China 2025" industrial policy has aroused deep suspicion in the U.S. about the persistence of state subsidies to prop up indigenous firms. It is therefore speculated that Washington has its lens trained on Huawei, which has emerged as the world's largest telecommunications equipment maker, surpassing Sweden's Ericsson.

Is USA threatened by Huawei's rise?

- The chairman of Huawei challenged the United States and other governments to provide evidence for claims the Chinese tech giant is a security risk to which USA has no proofs till date but states they are conducted in clandestine way with advanced technologies
- With Huawei overtaking major Tech companies in USA and also invigorating the 5G technologies this could dominate the technological landscape which US might have apprehensions about

Implications

- In the days that followed Meng's arrest, China detained Michael Kovrig, a Canadian diplomat on leave, and Michael Spavor, an entrepreneur, on vague allegations of "engaging in activities that endanger the national security." This could raise further volatility in the relationship between two countries
- There is concern that Canadian residents in China may face retribution for Ms. Meng's detention.

- Chinese firms are encouraging staff to buy Huawei smartphones, which has triggered an outpouring of nationalist support.

- * Several companies are offering employees subsidies for Huawei phone purchases, while others have even warned staff against buying Apple products.
- * Few companies have even threatened to fine employees who buy iPhones, charging them 100 per cent of the smartphone's market price
- The conflict between China and the West, especially the U.S., raises serious concerns over issues that are germane to international business and trade. The first is its impact on the troubled state of international relations and international law that operates in such cases.
 - * There is also the issue of the apparent ease and arbitrariness with which a nation determined to outwit a rival can hit the latter hard. There does not seem to be an ethical set of rules.
 - * The implications of the incident, in terms of the need for a protocol between nations in the area of criminal justice must be pondered over.
- This is bound to have a negative impact on U.S.-China trade ties as the Chinese will not be too happy about the continuing assault on multinational companies which have their roots in China.
- The arrest might suggest that the U.S. may not go soft on its demand for the protection of intellectual property rights during its talks with the Chinese authorities, as Huawei has violated intellectual property rights with the tacit approval of the Chinese government.

How did other countries react?

- Australia and the United Kingdom, have also been quite wary about doing business with Huawei due to the alleged gathering of intelligence by the company. In particular, they fear that Huawei's involvement in building their 5G network could lead to problems linked to cyber-espionage.

Conclusion

- United States could simply have taken action against Huawei on the grounds that it breached US sanctions against Iran instead of arresting Meng.
- On the other side China could have made friends with many countries that see the Huawei case as more driven by long-term US strategic interests than the law.
 - * It could have sought support from the many Asian and European allies of the US that resent the Iran sanctions: the way the US abuses the power of the dollar and its banking system to enforce petty spite at Iran and its trade.

8. India-South Africa relations

Context

- South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was chief guest for India's Republic Day in 2019
- This is the second time a South African leader is Chief Guest at Republic Day — Nelson Mandela was the chief guest in 1995.

Introduction

- President Ramaphosa's visit assumes significance as India celebrates the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi.
- Mr. Ramaphosa related the story of Gandhiji's impact on South Africa, on Mandela, and the way the combined legacy of the two icons moulded the relationship between the two countries. He saw India and South Africa as "two sister countries separated by an ocean, but bound by history."
- Mr. Ramaphosa's message was that in view of the rich past of this special relationship, the two nations should strive harder to keep it strong and vibrant.
- The president's visit strengthened the people-to-people aspect of the bilateral partnership, and focusing on the implementation of previous agreements signed by the two governments.
- According to the official note on India-South Africa relations on the website of India's High Commission in Pretoria, India was the first country to sever trade relations with the apartheid government, and subsequently imposed a complete — diplomatic, commercial, cultural and sports — embargo on South Africa.
 - * India worked consistently to put the issue of apartheid on the agenda of the UN, NAM and other multilateral organizations and for the imposition of comprehensive international sanctions against South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) maintained a representative office in New Delhi from the 1960s onwards.
- India actively worked for the AFRICA Fund to help sustain the struggle through support to the frontline states.

Details

- The focus of engagement was on Implementation as New Delhi and Pretoria had signed a large number of agreements
- The visit resulted in finalization of a strategic programme of cooperation aimed at implementation in a time-bound manner.
- The specific emphasis in the next three years would be on promoting defence
 - * Defence cooperation extends to other areas too: maritime security, joint training exercises on sea and land, and provision of training facilities.

- The two leaders also witnessed the exchange of two new agreements of cooperation.

* These formally linked the Research and Information System for Developing Countries, a policy research institute in Delhi, and two premier South African think tanks — the Institute for Global Dialogue and the South African Institute of International Affairs.

- The two sides also expressed concern at the slow pace of UN reforms and committed themselves to securing representation in an expanded UN Security Council to achieve a more representative UN Security Council Membership.

Economic Front

- With the bilateral trade between India and South Africa at \$ 10 bn, both are keen on expansion of cooperation in sectors including agro-processing, defence, mining and the financial sector.
- India will also be setting up Gandhi-Mandela Skills Institute will soon be opened in Pretoria.
- They also reiterated their commitment to working together on strengthening cooperation to address fugitive economic offenders.

Concerns

A continuous process is under way to identify inhibiting factors,

- Despite promotion, bilateral trade and investment are yet to show robust and speedy expansion.
- Some of them relate to the small size of the South African economy and its slow rate of growth.
- Lack of direct air connectivity and South Africa's rigid business visa regime are seen as discouragements.

* Mr. Ramaphosa agreed to reform the visa regime.

Multilateral groupings

- India-South Africa cooperation in multilateral groupings came up for a close review, especially the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
- New momentum is being imparted to IBSA, which has been 'displaced' by the larger grouping, BRICS.
- There are talks to strengthen the relationship in IBSA
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ramaphosa agreed on measures to further strengthen IORA. A specific decision was to enhance cooperation to harness the potential of the Blue Economy within the IORA framework.

Diaspora Relationship

- In June 2018, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's visit to South Africa honoured 25 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the 100th birth anniversary of Nelson Mandela, and 125 years of the Pietermaritzburg train incident.

Background

- The close links between India and South Africa from the perspective of migration is well known.
- There is vast documentation of historical migrant streams — from the arrival of indentured labourers in Natal in 1860 to the arrival of Indian traders after 1880.
 - * Durban, in particular, is known to host one of the largest concentrations of the Indian diaspora.
- Data from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) show the population of Overseas Indians in South Africa in December 2018 to be over 1.5 million: 60,000 Non-Resident Indians and 15,00,000 Persons of Indian Origin.

Indian Migration

- Indian migrants are driven to South Africa because of cultural relatedness and the presence of networks from the home country.
 - * In the Gauteng province, Indian migrants first arrive in areas with existing Indian concentrations, such as Fordsburg, Lenasia, and Laudium.
 - * Fordsburg is well known as one of the most vibrant places in Johannesburg, for its iconic Oriental Plaza and variety of street foods, halaal shops and Indian sweetmeats.
- This influx of migrant groups has resulted in the exchange of ideas, goods and cultures at a micro neighbourhood/street level

Xenophobia and its concerns

- Even as South African Indians grapple with the idea of India as their homeland, their idea of South Africa as 'home' has given rise to antagonism towards the new Indian migrants.
- Furthermore, Indian migrant traders, alongside Chinese traders, have been at the receiving end of xenophobic attacks and violence.
- China Malls, the Oriental Plaza and other trading spaces have witnessed violent burglaries and break-ins.
- Much of this is driven by hatred stemming from the perception that migrants are taking away the jobs of local South Africans.
- The real story, however, is that migrants have made positive contributions to South Africa's economy and society. In fact, cities like Johannesburg are driven by migrants. Yet, this receives little attention in mainstream policy discourse or in bilateral/multilateral relationships.

Recent developments

- Speaking along the sidelines of the African Union Summit in Kigali, Rwanda, in March 2018, President Ramaphosa "urged South Africans to welcome and embrace foreign nationals from the [African] continent"

- At the informal meeting of BRICS leaders in Buenos Aires, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the need for "smooth movement of labourers worldwide" in the context of managing labour relations in global value chains.

Way forward

- Contemporary India and South Africa need to recognise and harness the potential of new migratory flows.
- Only then can we realise our true strength as allies in BRICS or IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa). The emphasis on skill development, South-South cooperation, and people-to-people contact, significant as it is, cannot be delinked from cross-border flows of people, who are rapidly transforming the employment and migration landscape in both countries.
- At the same time, free labour mobility on its own is not enough; we need measures to safeguard and uphold labour standards globally.

Red Fort Declaration- India and South Africa

- The Strategic Partnership between India and South Africa was signed in March 1997 by the then South African President Nelson Mandela and former PM H.D. Deve Gowda

Context

- India and South Africa will update their Strategic Partnership by agreeing on a comprehensive "roadmap" on the way ahead, as well as relaxing visa restrictions
- Officials said all aspects the partnership would be reviewed and updated with a three-year plan of action on security cooperation, trade and investment, tourism, harnessing the 'blue economy', maritime cooperation, agriculture, science and technology projects.

9. Kuril Islands**Background**

- The Second World War left behind many problems inherited from history, not least in Asia in respect of multiple disputed territories.
- One of them concerns four islands in the Kurile chain that are claimed by Japan but occupied by Russia as successor state of the Soviet Union.
- Despite the passage of over 70 years, this dispute has defied solution and prevented the conclusion of a Russo-Japanese peace treaty

History



- The Kuril Islands are an archipelago of some 56 islands spanning about 1,800 km from Japan's Hokkaido to Russia's Kamchatka. All of them are under Russian jurisdiction.
- But Japan claims the two large southernmost islands, Etorofu and Kunashiri, and two others, Shikotan and Habomai, as its 'northern territories'.
- These islands were occupied by the Soviet Union in August 1945, after which the entire Japanese population, numbering less than 20,000, was evicted.
- The islands are now populated by the various ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union, but only eight of them are actually inhabited.
- Moscow's legal claim is based on the post-war settlements of Yalta and San Francisco, whereas the
 - * Japanese claim is founded on the Russia-Japan treaties of 1855 and 1875.



Significance of these Islands

- The prime value of the islands is its strategic importance.
 - * The Russians have deployed missile systems, plan a submarine project there, and intend to prevent any American military use of the islands.
 - * Moscow is concerned about Tokyo amending Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which disallows Japan from maintaining a military force or using force to settle international disputes, and views with anxiety the fact that Japan is among the world's biggest spenders on defence and has a very powerful military.
 - * Japan plays host to American bases and missile systems, and plans to spend \$240 billion up to 2024 on cruise missiles, missile interceptors, fighter jets and aircraft carriers.
 - * Responsible for this military build-up are apprehensions about threats from China and North Korea.
- Political Impact
 - * Public opinion in both countries is totally averse to any concession. Leaders in both Russia and Japan are aware that their domestic political positions would be severely at risk from right-wing and conservative circles were they to suggest even the slightest compromise.

Steps taken by Both Govt's for active engagement

- After Mr. Putin's visit to Japan in 2016, both leaders have embarked on some joint undertakings on the islands without calling in question the claims and legal positions of either side.
- In two summits last year, they agreed to joint field surveys and joint economic activities with the identification of specific projects, the enterprises that would undertake them, and three levels of supervision.

- These proposals cover marine species and aquaculture, greenhouse strawberry and vegetable cultivation, development of package tourism, wind power generation, and the reduction and disposal of garbage.
- They also agreed to scheduled visits by Japanese families who sought to visit the graves of their ancestors, and two such visits have already taken place.
- The Japanese have further proposed safe opportunities for fishing salmon and trout without using prohibited driftnet methodology, and cooperation in disaster prevention.
- These may seem small steps, but underlying them is a serious purpose: to build trust. Summits and Foreign Ministers' meetings have become commonplace.

Why are they getting closer setting aside past issues?

- Although Russia has for long been a hypothetical enemy of Japan's, Mr. Abe's wish to engage with Russia stems from
 - * the rapid rise of China, which spends three times more on defence than Japan,
 - * The perceived threat from North Korea, which recently fired two ballistic missiles over Japan as a taunt to the U.S.
 - * Russia is now seen in Japan as the lesser enemy, and improving relations with Moscow might drive a wedge in the growing quasi-alliance between Russia and China, a break-up desired by the U.S.-led Western alliance.
- Tokyo notes that the Russian Far East is endowed with plentiful natural resources which are in need of investments, but is hampered by a small population, whereas China has 100 million citizens along that shared land border.
 - * Japan has no territorial or demographic ambitions in Russia other than the Kuriles, and has the capacity to transform the vast contiguous areas of Russia.

Lessons that can be drawn by India

- Kashmir is essentially a territorial dispute of almost equal vintage as the Kuriles. Traditionally hostile neighbors can identify common interests and explore unorthodox avenues along which to proceed in search of innovative solutions to apparently insoluble disputes.
- This requires strong leadership and a bold imagination. Neither India nor Pakistan lacks either attribute.

Conclusion

- If both sides keep waiting for the most auspicious time to make the first move, it will never come about. Therefore the political leadership has to take bold steps to engage and find a settlement for benefit and peace in the region of Kashmir.

10. Manbij

- It is a city in the northeast of Aleppo in northern Syria
- Manbij represents a strategic centre for ISIS where it has established a route to smuggle weapons, assets and foreign fighters from Europe and Asia.

Measures taken

- Manbij has become the new epicenter of the fight against so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It has been led by
 - * Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) backed by the U.S,
 - * Syrian regime supported by Russian
- The operation's ultimate goal is to close a strategic pocket for ISIS between the Turkish border and the city of Raqqa in central Syria.
 - * Raqqa has symbolic value as it was the first province the Syria regime lost in the opposition in early 2013 – embodying Damascus' lack of control.
- By leading an offensive at the same time, the SDF and the Syrian regime are closing in on ISIS.
- Recapturing Manbij would therefore isolate ISIS, and deprive it of its last supply route from Turkey and considerably weaken its ability to launch attacks. This would be the first step towards taking back control over and reconstructing an economically devastated country.



11. Panj Tirath

Context

- The provincial Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government in northwest Pakistan has declared the ancient Hindu religious site of Panj Tirath in Peshawar as national heritage.

Details

- Panj Tirath, which got its name from the five pools of water present there, also contains a temple and a lawn with date palm trees.

- The five pools of the heritage site now come under the ambit of Chacha Yunus Park and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- It is believed that Pandu, a mythical king in the Mahabharata, belonged to this area and Hindus used to come to these pools for bathing during the month of Kartik and worship for two days under the trees.
- The site was damaged during the reign of the Afghan Durrani dynasty in 1747, however it was restored by local Hindus during the period of Sikh rule in 1834
- The government also announced a fine of up to Rs 2 million and five years' imprisonment for anyone found guilty of damaging the historic site.

12. Israel and Saudi Arabia increasing intimacy

Introduction

- There is growing show of bonhomie between the Israel and Saudi. This can be explained in large part with reference to the old adage, "my enemy's enemy is my friend" with respect to Iran. Both the countries perceive Iran as the primary threat to their strategic interests in West Asia.
- Saudi Arabia is engaged in a fierce competition with Iran for influence in the Persian Gulf and wider West Asia.
- Iran is a potential challenger to Israel's nuclear monopoly in West Asia and uses its influence in the Levant to impede Israeli dominance of the region.

Reason for Israel getting closer to Saudi

- First, Saudi Arabia's lead in establishing relations with Israel, even if covert, is likely to induce other Arab states, especially the oil rich monarchies of the Gulf, to open their economies to Israeli investment and technical expertise, thus bringing Israel substantial economic benefits. Israel's success in achieving this objective is critically dependent upon developing a significant, even if unacknowledged, relationship with Saudi Arabia.
- Second, the Israeli government estimates that improved relations with the Saudi regime, the "guardian" of Islam's two holiest sites, will help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to Tel Aviv's satisfaction. This means Israel continuing to control the entire territory between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea without giving the Palestinians any civil or political rights.
- Third, Israel and Saudi Arabia have a common interest in preventing the democratisation of Arab countries.

- * Authoritarian governments in the Arab world allow Israel to parade itself as the only democracy in West Asia.

- * Saudi Arabia is mortally afraid of a democratic wave in the Arab world since it would further highlight the despotic nature of its regime. This apprehension drove its opposition to the democracy movements, especially in Egypt and Bahrain, during the short-lived Arab Spring.

U.S. Approval

- The Saudi-Israeli rapprochement has been actively supported by the Trump administration.
- The United States is extremely interested in the formation of a joint front between Saudi Arabia and Israel against Iran, America's principal adversary in West Asia.

However Yemeni misadventure and Khashoggi murder has temporarily suspended this active engagement with Israel as Saudi cannot take greater political risks at this moment

Conclusion

- One can, therefore, conclude that their common hostility towards Iran and their close security relationship with the U.S. will eventually prompt Saudi Arabia and Israel to resume their covert relationship and eventually make it public.
- However, their contacts are likely to remain frozen for some time until the Khashoggi murder recedes from public memory.

13. India- Norway Relations

Context

- Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg is on a three-day visit to India

Agreements

- The two sides signed a MoU on India-Norway Ocean Dialogue and the establishment of the Joint Task Force on 'Blue Economy' under aegis of the MoU, in order to promote multi-sectoral cooperation in various aspects of Blue Economy.
- The two sides also discussed cooperation in the areas of security, counter-terrorism, higher education, research and innovation, energy, ICT, climate and environment, maritime sector, fisheries and aquaculture.
- India expressed its appreciation for Norway's support towards India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and the Australia Group (AG).

14. How India's Republic Day Chief Guest is chosen?

Introduction

- The visit of the Chief Guest at the Republic Day parade is similar to a State visit, but given the ceremony involved, it is the highest honour that we can accord to our guest in protocol terms.

- The Chief Guest is given the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan, he attends the reception in the evening hosted by the President of India, he lays a wreath at Rajghat, there is a banquet in his honour, a lunch hosted by the Prime Minister, and calls by the Vice-President and the External Affairs Minister.
- The centrepiece of the visit is that he accompanies the President, flanked by the horse-mounted President's Bodyguards, to the saluting base on Rajpath from where the President reviews the Republic Day parade.

How is the decision taken?

- The government extends its invitation to a Head of State or Government after careful consideration. This process commences almost six months ahead of Republic Day.
- There is a range of issues that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) considers, the foremost among which is the nature of India's relationship with the country concerned.
- Among other factors are political, economic, and commercial relations, the neighborhood, military cooperation, prominence in regional groupings, or past association in the Non Aligned Movement, in which newly independent countries united in a common struggle against colonialism, apartheid, and the domination of the developed countries.
- The MEA, after deliberations, seeks the Prime Minister's approval, after which Rashtrapati Bhavan's clearance is sought.
- India's ambassadors in the concerned countries then try to ascertain discreetly the potential Chief Guests' programme and availability for Republic Day.

Preparation

- All aspects of the visit are gone through, such as security, logistics, medical requirements, if necessary, with the active cooperation of the concerned Departments of the Government of India and the governments of the states which the Chief Guest may visit before coming to New Delhi, or after Republic Day.

Significance

- The visit is full of symbolism — it portrays the Chief Guest as participating in India's pride and happiness, and reflects the friendship between the two peoples represented by the President of India and the Chief Guest.
- In the modern world, visual coverage is of great importance, and the programmes and protocol keep this in view. The various Chief Guests and their ambassadors in New Delhi have been profuse in their praise for our ceremonies and the protocol we accord. Our hospitality reflects our traditions, culture, and history.

15. Powering South Asian integration (India- South Asia)

- On December 18, 2018, the Union Ministry of Power issued a memo that set the rules for the flow of electricity across South Asian borders.
- Experts opine that when evaluated against the turbulent politics around the issue, the new guidelines are a startling departure from India's previous stance.
- They further point out that in an atmosphere of regional intrigue and mistrust, it is a rare and recent example of political pragmatism.
- Further, it is important not only because it leads South Asian electricity trade in progressive directions but is also a concession to India's neighbours in an area of political and economic importance.

A course correction

- The revision is a response to two years of intense backroom pressure from neighbours, particularly Bhutan and Nepal, to drop trade barriers put up in 2016.
- The new guidelines meet most of their demands that were timed to coincide with the recent visit of Bhutan's new Prime Minister.
- India has thus signalled that it is serious about working with neighbours on the issues that should undergird 21st century South Asian regionalism, such as electricity trade.
- Experts have pointed out that this course correction is a return to a trajectory of incremental, hard-earned progress developed over the decades.
- Ideas of tying South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries together with cross-border energy flows — that punctuated the early 2000s — began to gain steam with substantial power trade agreements between India and Bhutan (2006) and Bangladesh (2010).
- These were driven by India's need for affordable power to fuel quickened growth in a recently liberalised economy.
- The highpoint came in 2014 with the signing of the SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation and the India-Nepal Power Trade Agreement in quick succession. The new government in New Delhi was keen on regional cooperation, and these agreements imposed few restrictions on trade. Instead, they laid the contours of an institutional structure that would allow private sector participation and facilitate market rationality in electricity commerce.
- At the Fifth SAARC Energy Ministers' meeting in the year 2014, Power Minister Piyush Goyal said he dreamt of 'a seamless SAARC power grid within the next few years' and offshore wind projects 'set up in Sri Lanka's coastal borders to power Pakistan or Nepal'. Yet, two years later, in the year 2016, the Union Ministry of Power released guidelines that imposed a slew of major restrictions on who could engage in cross-border electricity trade.

- Experts have pointed out that there was a strong undercurrent of defensiveness in the guidelines of 2016. They seemed to be a reaction to perceptions of increased Chinese investment and influence in the energy sectors of South Asian neighbours.

A Closer Look

- It is important to note that the guidelines prevented anyone other than Indian generators in the neighbouring country, or generators owned by that country's government, from selling power to India.
- Excluded were scores of privately held companies, particularly in Nepal, that had hoped to trade with India.
- In restricting access to the vast Indian market, the economic rationale for Nepali hydropower built for export was lost.

Concerns Espoused by Neighbours:

- Bhutan was worried about a clause that required the exporting generation companies to be majority owned by an Indian entity.
- This created friction in joint ventures between India and Bhutan.
- Bhutan also fretted about limited access to India's main electricity spot markets, where it would have been well placed to profit from evening peaks in demand.
- Bangladesh had sensed an opportunity to partially address its power crisis with imports from Bhutan and Nepal routed through Indian territory but the guidelines complicated this by giving India disproportionate control over such trade.
- Experts point out that after two years of protests from neighbours, the new guidelines resolve all these issues and restore the governance of electricity trade to a less restrictive tone.
- Further, the earlier concerns that India was enabling the incursion of foreign influence into neighbouring power sectors seem to have been replaced by an understanding that India's buyer's monopoly in the region actually give it ultimate leverage.
- More broadly, India seems to have acknowledged that the sinews of economic inter-dependency created by such arrangements have the political benefit of positioning India as a stable development partner rather than one inclined to defensive realpolitik.

Concluding Remarks:

- It is important to note that a liberal trading regime is in India's national interest.
- Further, as India transitions to a power grid dominated by renewables, regional trade could prove useful in maintaining grid stability.
- Major commitments to renewables, which could amount to half of India's installed power within a decade, have prompted justifiable concerns about stabilising the grid when the sun goes down or in seasons when renewables are less potent.

- Harnessing a wider pool of generation sources, particularly hydropower from the Himalayas that ramps up instantly as India turns on its lights and appliances after sunset, could be an important instrument in achieving a greener grid. Nepal and Bhutan have long recognised that their prosperity is tied to the sustainable use of vast hydropower reserves.
- In conclusion, the new guidelines are a tentative first step towards the creation of a true regional market in which generators across the subcontinent compete to deliver low-cost, green energy to consumers. Since this would soften the hard borders of South Asia, it is essentially a political vision.
- Further, experts point out that the new guidelines are a significant step in this direction because, for the first time, they allow tripartite trading arrangements, where power generated in a country is routed over the territory of a neighbour to be consumed in a third. This is a crucial move towards the evolution of complex, multi-country market arrangements.
- Such markets require the construction of regional institutions that absorb the politics and manage the technicalities of electricity trade.
- At present, this function is managed by the Indian state because of its geographic centrality and the ready availability of institutions that manage its domestic power sector.
- However, as volumes increase and experience in regional trade grows, South Asian nations might feel the need to build joint, independent regional institutions that proffer clear and stable rules of the road. The political vision to create this — felt in the new guidelines — must be maintained.

16. Still nothing to show for (The Economic Crisis in Pakistan)

Background

- In October 2018, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan in a public address stated that Pakistanis should stop worrying, "Ghabrain nahin, hausla rakhain (do not worry, have fortitude)."
- However, experts have pointed out that after five months of waiting for the government to deliver on its numerous promises, perhaps it is now time to really start worrying.

Political Transitions in Pakistan:

- Experts opine that in each of the three recent elections in Pakistan, in 2008, 2013 and last year in July, 2018, a different political party won and formed the government.
- As a matter of fact, the Pakistan Peoples Party in 2008, following Benazir Bhutto's assassination, had two Prime Ministers in its five-year tenure; however, during this period, with Asif Zardari as President of Pakistan, this five-year tenure is better known as Mr. Zardari's government.

- Similarly, after 2013, the Pakistan Muslim League's Nawaz Sharif made a remarkable reappearance in Pakistan's political scene and became Prime Minister for the third time, only to be debarred and removed from office, and subsequently imprisoned, and was replaced by one of his party members as Prime Minister. The 2013 government, even with Mr. Sharif behind bars, was known as his government.
- The third transition, or 'experiment' as it has been called since last year well before the elections took place, was for Pakistan's military and judiciary, the so-called 'establishment', to work together and ensure an electoral victory for the third political party in as many elections, with Imran Khan winning.
- The electoral results in 2008 and 2013 were not unexpected. After Benazir Bhutto's killing, a sympathy wave led to her party winning enough seats to form a coalition government, but with its particularly poor performance in its five-year tenure, Mr. Sharif's victory was also not unexpected.
- Despite the incarceration of Mr. Sharif and the multiple cases against him in 2017 and 2018, the general perception was that his party would probably get re-elected, albeit with a smaller majority.
- It is important to note that Mr. Imran Khan's victory followed on a multi-month strategy by the establishment to ensure that he would win, with ample evidence suggesting that he was ushered in with much help from behind the scenes.
- Some experts opine that his shell-shocked victory speech a few hours after the elections suggested that even he was taken aback when victory was handed to him.

The Past Five months

- Some experts suggest that the previous five months is long enough time to be able to assess what a new government has done and the direction it intends to follow.
- As a matter of fact, both the Zardari government of 2008 and the Sharif government in 2013 quickly went into taking numerous decisions soon after being elected.
- In 2008, with support from the Opposition led by Mr. Sharif, Mr. Zardari and his government worked together to jointly address issues concerning the economy, and to remove the then President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, by initiating a process to have him impeached, leading to his resignation.
- Differences emerged between Mr. Sharif and Mr. Zardari over issues about an amnesty granted to political leaders and about the reinstatement of members of the judiciary dismissed while General Musharraf was President.
- Nevertheless, the main purpose apparent from the beginning had been served and was clear from the start, to reclaim popular political space from the military, and to reassert the sovereignty of the law.
- Experts point out that Mr. Sharif, when he was elected in 2013, from the very first moment, started work on addressing Pakistan's biggest problem at that time, the electricity crisis which was crippling the economy. After taking several decisions within days of assuming power, he started to put the economy on some track, and agreed to an International Monetary Fund programme.
- Critics of the present administration in Pakistan allege that the most noticeable demonstration of Mr. Khan's government over the last five months has been best reflected in its ineptitude and indecision. They further point out that for the past five months, one has been waiting for some major policy direction, vision, but none so far has emerged.
- Critics point out that other than the 'we will put all the corrupt politicians in jail' mantra, the present administration in Pakistan has been lacking in foresight and a sense of purpose.
- Crucially, it is not inexperience which is the cause for this. Most of Mr. Imran Khan's Ministers and advisers have been in government with one political party or another. In fact, many worked with General Musharraf when he was President.

The Economic Crisis in Pakistan

- Perhaps the most urgent and pressing problem facing Pakistan today is that of an economy quickly going into a crisis state, largely on account of inaction and uncertainty created by the Finance Minister.
- Pakistan's growth rate in the fiscal year ending in June 2018 was 5.8%, the highest in 13 years.
- For the current fiscal year the expectations are that it will be closer to 3%.
- Inflation today is the highest in six years, and interest rates have been driven to double-digit levels with the Pakistani rupee depreciating 34% in 12 months.
- There is a growing balance of payments crisis, with exports stagnant and imports still rising, along with a fiscal deficit of more than 6% of GDP.
- The stock market has fallen, as have investor confidence and ratings of the economy.
- Foreign direct investment has fallen drastically since early 2018.
- The China Pakistan-Economic Corridor (CPEC), which was touted as Pakistan's 'Marshall Plan', seems to have completely gone off the radar for now, as the Chinese rethink their strategy for Pakistan.
- Experts suggest that knowing all this, Mr. Khan and his finance and economic team have done little to stabilise Pakistan's economy, to draw a strategy to address these exacerbating problems.
- Further, other than begging for loans from the only three friends Pakistan is left with — Saudi Arabia, China and the UAE — there has been an absence of ideas about what to do.

- The populist promises of the election manifesto of Mr. Khan, of making Pakistan a model welfare state on the lines of the Prophet's Medina, of providing millions of jobs and houses to Pakistanis, will all come undone unless the economy is first fixed.

Concluding Remarks:

- The single most prominent feature of Mr. Khan's five months has been his repeated pronouncements that he and his government are 'on the same page' with Pakistan's military and judiciary.
- Experts point out that unlike Mr. Zardari and Mr. Sharif, who are both fairly astute and experienced politicians, Mr. Khan probably doesn't realise the consequences of what this means and how being on the same page with dominating and powerful unelected institutions undermines and stifles the agency of elected governments.
- Finally, critics point out that rather than having used the short breathing space following his electoral victory by taking some resolute decisions, Mr. Khan's inactions may not only reflect his inability to understand how to run a government but might simply be because he expects others on this 'same page' to do his bidding.
- In many ways, with a media that is strangled, and politicians of the Opposition being hounded in the name of 'accountability', Pakistan may be back to its tried and trusted model of controlled democracy.

17. A failed coup in Venezuela (Crisis in Venezuela)

Brief Look at the Past:

- The socialists, led by Hugo Chávez, came to power in 1999. After the U.S. attempted to overthrow Chávez and the socialists in 2002, things calmed down. Oil prices rose and the U.S. was distracted by events in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- For a decade, Venezuela was able to lead a regional process of integration on an anti-imperialist foundation.
- But, when Chávez died in 2013, the experiment began to unravel. Oil prices fell dramatically, and the U.S. had already turned its attention to Latin America.
- Currently, Venezuela faces a major political, economic and social crisis, with hyperinflation, acute scarcity of food, medicine and other basic goods and one of the world's highest murder rates.
- Venezuela has grappled with an economic and political crisis of its own making for almost two years now. When oil prices started falling from its 2014 highs, it badly hit an economy that was over-reliant on petroleum exports and was borrowing heavily to fund its over-spending on social welfare programmes, which former President Hugo Chávez liked to describe as a "Bolivarian revolution".

- The opposition, whose attempts to overthrow the Socialists, including the 2002 coup against Chávez, had failed in the past, launched protests against Mr. Maduro. The government used brute force to suppress them, while the economic situation deteriorated. This left Venezuela in a constant state of economic hardships and violent street protests over the past two years.
- Further, the main opposition boycotted the presidential election, held in the year 2018, which Mr. Maduro won with 67.8% vote. Mr. Guaidó's claim is that the election was not free and fair and therefore Mr. Maduro is not the legitimate President — a claim that the U.S. and its allies back.

Editorial Analysis:

Current events in Venezuela:

- Caracas, the capital of Venezuela has emerged as the fulcrum of geopolitical tension.
- As a matter of fact, an attempted coup on January 23, 2019 has failed.
- The U.S. decided to recognise a member of the Opposition, Juan Guaidó, as the President of Venezuela.
- S. officials called upon the military to rise up against the government of President Nicolás Maduro.
- Experts have opined that this was against the charters of the United Nations and of the Organisation of American States (OAS).
- Experts have also pointed out that there is little respite for Venezuela- a country where tension sits heavily from one end to another.
- It is important to note that thus far, the government of Mr. Maduro remains in power, and the military has pledged its faithfulness to the re-elected president. It is unlikely that the Venezuelan Opposition — controlled by the old oligarchy — will be able to engineer a coup from within the country. It tried such a political manoeuvre in 2002, which failed. This time it has failed again.

Current Situation of Crisis in Venezuela:

1 Political Crisis:

- The political crisis in Venezuela took a dangerous turn when Juan Guaidó, the new head of the National Assembly, declared himself "acting President", challenging the authority of President Nicolás Maduro.
- Soon after Mr. Guaidó's announcement, the U.S., Canada, Brazil and a host of other Latin American countries recognised the 35-year-old leader from the Popular Will party as interim President.
- A furious Mr. Maduro cut diplomatic ties with the U.S. and ordered American diplomats to leave in 72 hours.

2. Economic Crisis:

- Further, in Venezuela, oil prices have fallen to half of what they were at the highpoint of Chávez's government.
- Since the treasury of Venezuela is almost entirely replenished by the incomes from oil sales, the collapse of oil prices means the collapse of Venezuela's public finances.
- Unable to borrow easily, the country faces serious economic difficulties.
- Sanctions by the U.S. and the seizure of refining sites in the Caribbean put the country into a situation of great crisis.
- Further, Mr. Maduro's government was clueless when the economy started collapsing.
- At least 90% of the people now live below the poverty line, inflation is forecast to touch 10 million per cent this year, food and medicine shortages are widespread, and the economic woes have triggered a massive migrant crisis — nearly three million are estimated to have fled the country in recent years. No wonder that people are leaving the country, fleeing their homeland as it is suffocated for political purposes by the U.S. and its Latin American allies in the Lima Group.

Pressure from Neighbours:

- Colombia's Iván Duque and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro are both right-wing politicians who control the governments of Venezuela's neighbours.
- They have committed themselves to the overthrow of the Venezuelan government. Further, Venezuelans believe that Mr. Duque, Mr. Bolsonaro and U.S. President Donald Trump have overplayed their hands.
- After the attempted overthrow in 2017, the Venezuelan government tried to deepen public participation by the formation of a Constituent Assembly. It is true that the oligarchy hated this idea and that the western press amplified its views about this being anti-democratic.
- However, as many Venezuelans say, the Constituent Assembly and the many elections for candidates and referendums that came before 2017 have sharpened their political consciousness. Thus, it will be hard to fool them with talk of dictatorship.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts point out that the isolation of Venezuela is remarkable.
- As a matter of fact, not long ago, the country was the heartbeat of the leftist assertion in the hemisphere. Now, with the emergence of right-of-centre governments in Latin America and with an explosive energy for regime change in Washington, matters are more complex.
- Arreaza said that Mr. Maduro had invited the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, to visit Venezuela. She has not yet come.

- In conclusion, while Mr. Maduro shares a lot of the blame for the mismanagement of the economy, forcibly removing him from power with support from foreign nations may destabilise the country further, even leaving aside the legality of such a move. Guaidó may have hoped that by anointing himself a rebel President with backing from the U.S., he could win the support of sections of the armed forces, without which he cannot unseat Mr. Maduro.
- However, that plan appears to have failed with the military declaring its loyalty to President Maduro.
- Finally, the people of Venezuela deserve a better deal from a government that has led them to untold suffering and forced millions to flee the country. Destabilisation by interfering in the political process is not the solution.
- What is required is a coordinated international effort to restore some degree of economic and political normalcy. In the long run, it is up to the people of Venezuela to decide their own political destiny.

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Anti-lynching law by Manipur

Background

- Supreme Court anguished by what it described as 'horrific acts of mobocracy' — issued a slew of directions to the Union and State governments to protect India's 'pluralist social fabric' from mob violence.
- The court felt compelled to act in the shadow of of surging hate violence targeting religious and caste minorities. It also urged Parliament to consider passing a law to combat mob hate crime.
- The Union and most State governments have done little to comply with the directions of India's highest court. But Manipur became the first to pass a remarkable law against lynching

Manipur Law

The Manipur law closely follows the Supreme Court's prescriptions, creating a nodal officer to control such crimes in every State, special courts and enhanced punishments.

- Its definition of lynching is comprehensive "any act or series of acts of violence or aiding, abetting such act/acts thereof, whether spontaneous or planned, by a mob on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, ethnicity or any other related grounds"
- The law, however, excludes from its provisions solitary hate crimes.
 - * For the law to apply instead it requires that these hate crimes are undertaken by mobs (defined as a group of two or more individuals, assembled with a common intention of lynching), thereby excluding from its provisions solitary hate crimes.

1. Rules laid for Strict Police Action

- It lays down that "any police officer directly in charge of maintaining law and order in an area, omits to exercise lawful authority vested in them under the law, without reasonable cause, and thereby fails to prevent lynching shall be guilty of dereliction of duty" and will be liable "to punishment of imprisonment of one year, which may extend to three years, and with fine that may extend to fifty thousand rupees".
 - * Equally path breaking is that it removes the protection that is otherwise extended to public officials charged with any offence committed while acting in their discharge of official duty.

- At present, no court can take cognisance of such an offence except with the previous sanction of the State government.

- * The Manipur law means that now no prior sanction is required to register crimes against public officials who fail in their duties to prevent hate crimes such as lynching.

Karwan-e-Mohabbat

The Karwan-e-Mohabbat, or peace yatra, is a movement where activists visit places where lynchings and hate crimes have taken place and attempt to forge links between different communities.

- The activists in these cases have found that, the police acted brazenly in ways that would have been deemed crimes by public officials if a law such as the Manipur law had been in force.
- They arrived late deliberately, or watched even as the crimes were under way without restraining the mobs;
- they delayed taking those injured to hospital and on occasion even ill-treated them, ensuring their death;
- After the hate crimes, they tended to register criminal cases against the victims and to defend the accused.

If police officers knew that they could be punished for these crimes (which would also put them at risk of losing their jobs), it is very unlikely that they would have acted in this way. They would have prevented, or stopped in their tracks, these hate crimes, and protected the victims.

2. Rul Manipur law does away with the requirement of prior state sanction before acting on a hate crime.

- All hate crimes today should attract Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code, which is related to fostering enmity between people on the basis of religion, race, language and so on.
- But registering this crime requires prior permission of the State government, and most governments use this power to shield perpetrators of hate crimes who are politically and ideologically aligned to the ruling establishment.
- The Manipur law does away with this requirement, which would make acting against hate crimes far more effective and non-partisan.

3. The Law clearly lays down the duty and responsibility of the State government to make arrangements for the protection of victims and witnesses

- It should protect the victims from against any kind of intimidation, coercion, inducement, violence or threats of violence.

- It also prescribes the duty of State officials to prevent a hostile environment against people of the community who have been lynched, which includes economic and social boycott, and humiliation through excluding them from public services such as education, health and transport, threats and evictions.

4. Rehabilitation

- The last substantial contribution of the law is requiring the state to formulate a scheme for relief camps and rehabilitation in case of displacement of victims, and death compensation.
- Again, in most cases of lynching, we have found that States have only criminalised the victims, never supported the survivors who live not just in loss and fear, but also in penury.

Issues with the Law

- When we look back at the last four years, the majority of hate crimes were indeed by mobs of attackers and onlookers, but we also saw solitary hate murders, such as of the Bengali migrant Mohammad Afrazul in Rajasthan.
- This restriction of numbers is arbitrary, since the essence of what distinguishes these kinds of crimes is not the numbers of attackers but the motivation of hate behind the crimes; therefore, provisions of this law should apply to all hate crimes not just lynching, regardless of the numbers of persons who participate.

Conclusion

- The law needs to prescribe a much more expansive framework of mandatory gender-sensitive reparation, requiring the state to ensure that the victim of hate violence is assisted to achieve material conditions that are better than what they were before the violence, and that women, the elderly and children are supported regularly with monthly pensions over time.
- If emulated by the Union and other State governments, such a sterling law could substantially prevent hate attacks, ensure public officials are faithful to their constitutional responsibilities and victims, and that their families and communities are assured of protection and justice.

2. Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the introduction of a Bill namely The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018 in the Parliament for certain amendments in the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 so as to modify the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Union Cabinet approved the Home Ministry's proposal to replace the generic term 'any Naga tribes' with the specific names of the tribes that would qualify for recognition as Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

The following changes will be made in list of Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh:

- Deletion of 'Abor' in serial No. 1, as it is the same as 'Adi' in Serial No. 16.
- Replace Tai Khamti' instead of 'Khampti' at serial No. 6.
- Inclusion of 'Mishmi-Kaman' (Miju Mishmi), Idu (Mishmi) and Taraon (Digaru Mishmi) in serial No. 8.
- Inclusion of Monpa, Memba, Sartang, Sajolong (Miji) in serial No. 9 in lieu of 'Momba'.
- Inclusion of 'Nocte', 'Tangsa', 'Tutsa', 'Wancho' in lieu of 'Any Naga Tribes' in serial No. 10 in list of Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

The rationale for the proposed amendments are:

- Deletion of Abor – Removal of duplication
- Replace Khampti – There is no tribe called 'Khampti'
- Inclusion of Mishmi-Kaman, Idu and Taraon – Existing entry is only of 'Mishmi'. There is reportedly no such community.
- Inclusion of Monpa, Memba, Sartang, Wancho – Existing entry is of 'Any Naga Tribes'. These are reportedly the only Naga tribes in the State.
- Inclusion of Nocte, Tangsa, Tutsa, Wancho – Existing entry is of 'Any Naga Tribes'. These are reportedly the only Naga tribes in the State.

Significance

- These included will be able to derive benefits meant for STs under the existing schemes of the Government.
- They will also be entitled to benefits of reservation in services and admission to educational institutions as per Government policy

3. Jiban Sampark

- It is a project by Odisha Govt in partnership with UNICEF India to generate awareness about the development and welfare initiatives of state government among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of the state.
- The Jiban Sampark's focus areas will include skill development, empowering communities, cooperation and innovation among the groups of 75 tribal communities in the country, 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups residing in remote and far off areas of 12 district in Odisha

4. Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982

- Devadasi system is a religious practice whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty.

Context

- Two new studies on the devadasi practice was conducted by National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai
- They paint a grim picture of the apathetic approach of the legislature and enforcement agencies to crack down on the practice, particularly prevalent among oppressed communities of north Karnataka even after thirty-six years after the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982 was passed

Issue Area

- A disturbing aspect revealed by the new studies is that special children, with physical or mental disabilities, are more vulnerable to be dedicated as devadasis — nearly one in five (or 19%) of the devadasis that were part of the NLSIU study exhibited such disabilities.
- The NLS researchers found that girls from socio-economically marginalised communities continued to be victims of the custom, and thereafter were forced into the commercial sex racket.
- The TISS study buttresses the point by stressing that the devadasi system continues to receive customary sanction from families and communities.

Concerns with Law

- Reporting of cases pertaining to the custom under the Karnataka law is very low, with only four cases filed between 2011 and 2017
 - * None of these cases were filed in Ballari, where village and district authorities indicated that identifying and preventing the incidents was difficult.
- The law is used sparingly, and focuses on prosecution (including of the victims themselves) with no framework for rehabilitation.
- Despite sufficient evidence of the prevalence of the practice and its link to sexual exploitation, recent legislations such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012, and Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act of 2015 have not made any reference to it as a form of sexual exploitation of children, the NLSIU's Centre for Child and the Law noted.
- India's extant immoral trafficking prevention law or the proposed Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill 2018, also do not recognise these dedicated girls as victims of trafficking for sexual purposes.

Conclusion

- The State's failure to enhance livelihood sources for weaker sections of society fuels the continuation of the practice
- More inclusive socio-economic development and a more pro-active role from State agencies is mandatory

5. Khonds/Kondh/Kui

- The word Kondh means "mountaineer", derived from the Telugu word ko or ku, signifying a hill or mountain.
- These tribals still continue to call themselves as 'Kui people' and their hills as 'kui country'.
- The Kondhs speak kui .Kui belongs to the Dravidian group of languages and has considerable resemblance with Telugu, Kanarese and Tamil in grammar.
- Kui does not share any commonality with Oriya which is of Indo-Aryan origin and is spoken by the Oriyas
- Nevertheless, several Oriya words are used in Kui language because of close interaction between the two settlements.
- They are a designated Scheduled Tribe in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal

6. Khushi Scheme

- It is a scheme by Odisha Govt
- It will provide free sanitary napkin scheme for girl students from Class 6 to 12 in all the government and government-aided schools in the state.
- This will help in promoting health and hygiene among school-going adolescent girls leading to higher retention in school and greater empowerment of women.

7. Menstrual Hygiene for Adolescent girls Schemes**Background**

- Discussion of menstruation is largely taboo in our society.
- The stigma around it has resulted in a lack of information being shared between generations, particularly around the basic dos and don'ts when a girl begins her period.
- Research shows that at least 71% of girls in India do not know anything about menstruation before their first period.

Basic definitions

Adolescent girls		Adolescence describes the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. Girls aged 10 to 19 are adolescents.
Menarche		The time in a woman's life when her menstrual periods stop and she is no longer able to have children
Menstruation; periods'	'monthly	A biological process in a woman where each month blood and other material is discharged from the lining of the uterus. Menstruation occurs from the onset of puberty until the menopause, except during pregnancy.
Menstrual Management menstrual hygiene	Hygiene (MHM);	The (i) articulation, awareness, information and confidence to manage menstruation with safety and dignity using safe hygienic materials together with (ii) adequate water and agents and spaces for washing and bathing with soap and (iii) disposal of used menstrual absorbents with privacy and dignity
Menstrual absorbent		A sanitary cloth, napkin, towel or pad is an absorbent item worn by an adolescent girl or woman when she is menstruating, or directly after birth while she is bleeding. The material absorbs the flow of blood from her vagina
Menstrual waste		Includes a used sanitary cloth, napkin, towel or pad that contains blood
Bio-degradable; organic materials	compostable	A substance or object that is capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms and thereby avoiding pollution

Conclusion

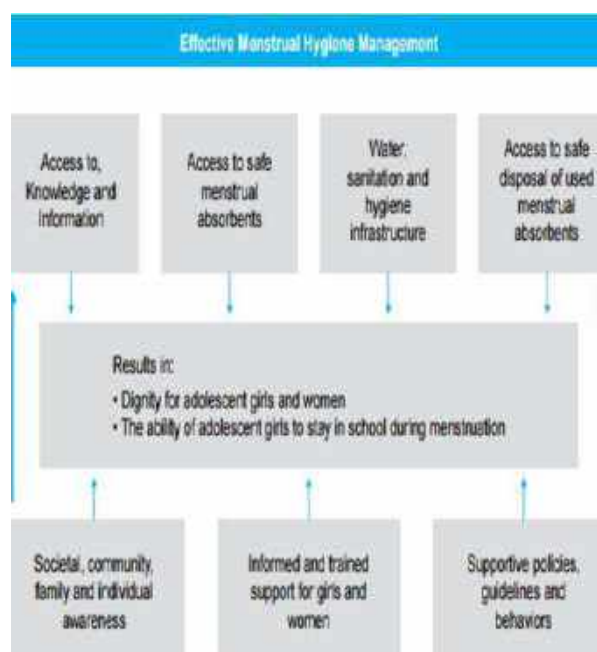
- The lack of awareness around her first period can put a young girl, sometimes as young as 10, through mental trauma and fear over what is happening to her,
- It will induce a sense of shame because of the age-old stigma around a menstruating woman.
- A young girl entering a crucial stage of her life is often made to feel that she is inferior in the family. There are numerous instances of girls not being allowed to participate in family celebrations, functions, prayers, and, sometimes, attend school.
- There are stories of girls dropping out of school in semi-urban and rural areas once they start menstruating.
- A high incidence of cervical cancer is reportedly linked to infections from soiled and damp cloth.
- The reason for women and girls not possessing sanitary napkins is driven by various factors, affordability being one.

Government Steps

To address the need of menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls residing primarily in rural areas, Government of India is supporting the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme, under which, funds are provided to States/UTs through National Health Mission for decentralized procurement of sanitary napkins packs for provision primarily to rural adolescent girls at subsidized rates as per proposals received from the States and UTs in their Programme Implementation Plans.

This scheme encompasses the following:

- Increasing awareness among adolescent girls on Menstrual Hygiene
- Improving access to and use of high quality sanitary napkins by adolescent girls in rural areas.
- Ensuring safe disposal of Sanitary Napkins in an environmentally friendly manner.
- Provision of funds to ASHAs to hold monthly meeting with adolescents to discuss issues related to menstrual hygiene.



Conclusion

- We need to educate girls and women about the need for clean, dry menstrual hygiene products and the pitfalls of wrong methods.
- To ensure that adolescent girls and women have the necessary support and facilities, it is important that the wider society, communities and families must challenge the status quo and break the silence around menstruation.
- It is therefore the responsibility of those with influence – including government officials and teachers, to find appropriate ways to talk about the issue and take necessary action.

8. Narikuravas (Jackal Catchers)

- They are indigenous tribes from the state of tamilnadu
- "Narikurava" is a combination of the Tamil words "Nari" and "Kurava" meaning "jackal people"
- They pride themselves on the traditional occupations of hunter-gathering and making and selling bead necklaces.

9. Web- Wonder Women Campaign

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development, has launched an online campaign, '#www: Web-WonderWomen'. The Campaign aims to discover and celebrate the exceptional achievements of women, who have been driving positive agenda of social change via social media.
- Through the campaign, the Ministry and the Campaign's Partners aim to recognize the fortitude of Indian women stalwarts from across the globe who have used the power of social media to run positive & niche campaigns to steer a change in society.

- This Campaign will recognize and acknowledge the efforts of these meritorious Women.
- The Ministry has partnered with Breakthrough and Twitter India on this.

10. Left out, abused (Neglect of child care institutions)

- Revelations of the sexual abuse of inmates in a balika grih at Muzaffarpur in Bihar underline a startling fact.
- As a matter of fact, experts have opined that child care institutions in India have been trapped in an administrative blind spot.
- Unfortunately, a home meant to protect girls rescued from exploitation itself turned into a den of predation.
- The shocking rot in the management of such shelters has now been reported by a Central government committee.
- It studied 9,589 Child Care Institutions and Homes, mostly run by NGOs, that come under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act.
- Experts believe that only an emergency measure to address the serious lacunae can bring some semblance of order to these faceless shelters.

The Unfortunate State of Affairs:

- Further, it is important to note that most of the inmates are orphaned, abandoned, sexually abused, trafficked or victims of disasters and conflict.
- Among them are 7,422 children in conflict with the law, and 3,70,227 in need of care and protection, including 1,70,375 girls.
- The fact that they often have to live in facilities without proper toilets, secure compounds or the opportunity to vent their grievances as provided for under law underscores the painful reality that they remain virtually invisible.
- It is important to note that reform of this depressing system, as the Ministry of Women and Child Development seeks, can be achieved only through systematic scrutiny by State governments.
- This could be done by appointing special officers whose task it would be to ensure that all institutions register under the JJ Act, account for funds received by each, and enforce mandatory child protection policies during adoption.
- As per the recently disclosed study, only 32% of Child Care Institutions or Homes were registered under the JJ Act as of 2016, while an equal number were unregistered, and the rest were either empanelled under other schemes or awaiting registration.
- The priority should be to bring about uniformity of standards and procedures, evolving common norms for infrastructure, human resources, financial practices and external audits.
- The panel found child care standards were poor in many institutions, sans proper bedding, food and nutrition and sanitation.

- Some States have too few homes, giving authorities little incentive to take up cases of children in distress. Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Kerala together account for 43.5% of all shelters.
- It is important to note that a few States do not have even one home of every category, such as child care, observation and adoption.
- The Ministry's study lays bare the disconnect between civil society and the welfare system for children, and the poor engagement elected representatives have with such a vital function.

Concluding Remarks:

- The imperative now is to turn the findings of the Ministry's committee into a blueprint for action.
- Further, credentialed NGOs should take a greater interest in this effort, holding the authorities to account.

11. Dancing around the Supreme Court – on ban imposed by the Maharashtra government on dance performances in bars

Context:

- Furt The Supreme Court recently struck down several statutory provisions and rules governing Maharashtra's dance bars. This decision forms part of a frequentative game that has evolved over 14 years between the Maharashtra government and the courts.

Background:

- In 2005, the Maharashtra government imposed a ban on dance performances in bars, with the exception of hotels rated three stars and above. The public rationale offered was that these performances were obscene, morally corrupt, and promoted prostitution.
- Dance performance licenses were cancelled with immediate effect. Subsequently, the affected parties filed petitions in the Bombay High Court.
- The High Court held against the government resulting in an appeal to the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court affirmed the High Court's decision in July 2013, quoting two reasons:
 - * The government could not discriminate between luxury hotels and other establishments seeking licenses for dance performances.
 - * The ban had proven to be counterproductive, resulting in the unemployment of over 75,000 women, many of whom were forced by circumstances to engage in prostitution.
- Rather than implementing the Supreme Court's decision, the government imposed an outright ban on all dance performances, whether in street bars or upmarket hotels, a strategy to side-line the judgement.

- Although the government's response addressed the court's first concern, it failed to address the second. This led to fresh proceedings in the Supreme Court.
- While the Supreme Court saw through the government's attempt to bypass its decision, it left room for the government to prohibit obscene dances with a view to protecting the dignity of the dancers.
- Yet again, the government responded in a matter of months. Rather than seeking to impose a ban on dance performances altogether, it only did so to the extent that these performances were obscene or overtly sexual. A number of other conditions were imposed:
 - * Applicants were required to "possess a good character" with no criminal antecedents.
 - * The establishment could not be within one kilometre of an educational or religious institution.
 - * A CCTV camera would need to be fitted at the entrance.
 - * Customers could not be permitted to throw coins or currency notes on the dancers, but could add tips to the bill.
 - * The permit room (where alcohol was served) and the dance room would need to be separated by a partition.
 - * The stage could not be smaller than a prescribed size.
- Some of these conditions were challenged in the Supreme Court on the basis that they were far too oppressive.
- On January 17 2019, the court upheld a few of these conditions, but struck down others.
- For example, it noted that the CCTV requirement violated the right to privacy of the dancers and the patrons, the "good character" requirement was vague, the partition between the permit room and the dance room was unjustified, and the one kilometre distance requirement was impractical.

Details:

- Amongst the dozens of applications filed since the new rules were put in place, not a single one had been approved by the government.
- The court therefore saw the government's most recent response as a ban on dance bars pass off as an attempt to regulate them.
- These developments yield insights on the institutional interaction between governments and the courts.
- Through each iteration of this case, the Maharashtra government has responded more swiftly to judicial decisions than the Supreme Court has to the government's attempts to sidestep them.

- * The final judicial decision in the first round took just short of eight years, while the government's response took about 11 months.
- * In the second round, the court took a year and three months to make its decision; the government responded in six months.
- * In the third round, the court has taken just short of three years. The government's response time is to be seen.

Reasons for disparity:

A number of structural reasons may account for this disparity.

- Despite heavy caseloads, courts must provide an opportunity for a fair hearing, deliberate, and set out reasons for their decisions. Courts will also typically not consider cases unilaterally, but are dependent on parties to bring proceedings in search of a remedy.
- Separately, the ban on dance bars has also received a concerning level of cross-party political support in Maharashtra, despite the regime changes since 2005. This has meant that legislation has often been enacted unopposed, without any meaningful discussion on the floor of the House.
 - * The amendments of 2014 sailed through the Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad within minutes on the following day after being approved by the Maharashtra Cabinet.
- The practical implication of the government being quicker than the courts is that even when government responses are imperfect, the court produces significant delays.
- The Supreme Court often deploys the writ of continuing mandamus (issuing a series of interim orders over a period of time to monitor compliance with its decisions) in public interest litigation cases that test the limits of its jurisdiction. It has chosen not to adopt that enforcement strategy in this case.

Way forward:

- The dance bar case yields insights on the institutional interaction between governments and the courts.
- This case outlines the vulnerability of what is otherwise seen as an all-powerful Supreme Court, especially when it depends on the government to comply with its decisions in some positive way.
- While the court cannot direct the enactment of legislation, it can monitor compliance with an order to issue licenses to qualified applicants.
- Even when the courts strike down legislation or rules, the level of compliance with their decisions often lies in the hands of the executive.
- These developments should also lead courts to introspect about the existing remedial landscape in cases where legislation is challenged.

12. Capable even if disabled (Disability Rights)

A Critical View of the Honourable Supreme Court's recent ruling:

- Critics have opined that in India, the Supreme Court's recent ruling, in *V. Surendra Mohan v. Union of India*, has to be regarded as one of the darkest in India's disability rights movement.
- The Court had to rule on the legality of the Tamil Nadu government's policy of reserving the post of civil judge only for people whose percentage of blindness does not exceed 40-50%, resulting in the exclusion of the applicant who was 70% blind.

What did the Court observe?

- The Court held that the government's decision was rational and reasonable.
- The Court ruled that a judicial officer has to possess a reasonable amount of sight and hearing to discharge her functions.
- Further, the Court accepted the claim that impaired vision makes it impossible to perform the functions required of judicial officers, such as assessing the demeanour of witnesses and reading and analysing evidence. It also accepted that asking a blind judicial officer to perform such administrative functions as recording dying declarations and conducting inquiries can result in avoidable complications.

Discussion Points that this judgement raises:

- Firstly, the view that a totally blind person cannot thrive as a judge is belied by several examples of successful judges who are blind.
- One is former South African Constitutional Court judge Zak Yacoob, who has repudiated the notion that one needs to be sighted to assess a witness's demeanour as being nonsensical, to U.S. Court of Appeals DC Circuit judge David S. Tatel, who thinks that it is neither fair nor accurate to impose low expectations on what blind lawyers can do.
- There is also former San Diego County Court judge David zumowski, who has described the view that a blind person lacks the wherewithal to become a judge as an unfair characterisation, to Yousaf Saleem who, last year, became Pakistan's first blind civil judge.
- Second, how, some contend, can a blind person be reasonably expected to thrive as a judge without being excessively dependent and inefficient? However, as the Supreme Court itself noted in 2017, "A lawyer can be just as effective in a wheelchair, as long as she has access to the courtroom and the legal library, as well as to whatever other places and material or equipment that are necessary for her to do her job well."
- Critics have also pointed out that those voicing such a statement of cynicism might find it equally hard to imagine how a blind person can write an article for *The Hindu*, or study computer science, as many blind Indians have done or be a successful civil servant, as Beno Zephine N.L. is.

- Third, critics assert that it is simply unacceptable to condemn disabled legal professionals, possessing the intellectual wherewithal to be a judge, to the status of outcasts only because the judges delivering the judgment in this case appear simply not to have bothered to notice the competence of the millions of disabled people who inhabit this world.
- As Judge Szumowski asks Indian judges, "if you went blind while on the bench, and were able to efficiently discharge your responsibility before this, how would you feel if told that you can no longer continue as a judge, even if you are able to perform your functions with some amount of retraining and adaptive tech?"

Concluding Remarks:

- In conclusion, it bears noting that "there is a distinct exhortatory dimension to be recognised in deciding whether an adjustment to assist a disabled person to overcome the disadvantage that she or he has in comparison to an able-bodied person is reasonable."
- Lastly, if we are to be truly committed towards ensuring that the constitutional promise of equality is fully realised, we must not lack the ability to pay the price of making reasonable accommodations.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Artificial Intelligence- India ranks third

Context

- According to an analysis by research agency Itihaasa, which was founded by Kris Gopalakrishnan, former CEO and co-founder of Infosys India ranks third in the world in terms of high quality research publications in artificial intelligence (AI) but is at a significant distance from world leader China.
- The agency computed the number of 'citable documents'— the number of research publications in peer-reviewed journals — in the field of AI between 2013-2017 as listed out by Scimago, a compendium that tracks trends in scientific research publications.

Details

- India third in the world with 12,135 documents, trailed behind
 - * China with 37,918 documents
 - * United States with 32,421 documents.
- However, when parsed by another metric 'citations'— or the number of times an article is referenced — India ranked only fifth and trailed the United Kingdom, Canada, the U.S. and China.
- The Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Information Technology were among the key centres for AI research.

2. Chang'e-4 lunar probe

- It is a Chinese lunar exploration mission which is named after Chinese moon goddess which will explore the far side of the moon

Far side of the Moon/Dark Side of the Moon

- The moon is tidally locked to Earth, rotating at the same rate as it orbits our planet, so most of the far side — or "dark side" — is never visible to us. This phenomenon is called synchronous rotation
 - * It is the hemisphere of the Moon that always faces away from Earth.
- It is called as dark side because it refers to the moon's unknown side or unexplored side

Difference between the near and far side

- The near side, which faces earth, has dark patterns;
 - * The far side, turned away, is marked with circular spots that are craters formed by meteorite collisions.
- The moon's near side is believed to have a thinner shell, this is due to meteorites bombardment of the shell, which cracked the shell, releasing lava which gushed out and covered traces of the impact and left dark patches.

- * Being thicker, the far side did not face such an erasure and bears the marks of the crater impacts.

- The near side of the moon also suffers from problem of noise. So the Communication devices and satellites have made it too noisy for radio astronomers to easily and accurately interpret signals.

- * On the other hand, the far side is a quiet place and a haven for earthly aspirations to set up a radio telescope that could reveal astronomical mysteries, such as the structure of the universe shortly after the Big Bang.

Details

- The tasks of the Chang'e-4 include astronomical observation, surveying the moon's terrain, land form and mineral make-up, and measuring the neutron radiation and neutral atoms to study the environment of its far side.
- Chang'e-4 has robotic lander and rover called Yutu-2 ("Jade Rabbit"), has landed at a site known as Von Kármán crater, a 180km depression located in the far side's southern hemisphere.
 - * But Von Kármán lies within a much bigger hole punched in the Moon - the South Pole-Aitken basin which is the largest impact crater on the Moon.
- The direct communication between Chang'e 4 and Earth is blocked because of the probe's position. To overcome this difficulty China also launched a relay satellite called Queqiao, or Magpie Bridge that is currently 400,000 km above Earth, positioned between it and the moon.
- The mission is the follow-up to Chang'e 3, the first Chinese landing on the Moon

Soft Landing

- China has now joined the U.S. and the former USSR as the only countries to have made a "soft landing" on the moon.
- When landing takes place without damage or destruction to the space vehicle it is called soft landing

Significance

- The early history of the solar system was violent. That's when large objects — asteroids or comets — pounded the rocky planets and left craters, some that are more than 600 miles across
 - * But most evidence of this tumultuous past has disappeared, erased by time. On Earth and other rocky worlds, volcanoes have washed away these craters over billions of years.

- * The far side of the moon has retained a pristine record of its youth, particularly the number of times that ancient objects pummeled its surface.
- It would reveal secrets about our solar system's early days
- It could help astronomers see the universe more clearly.
- It could guide us in planetary studies, and help in understanding exoplanets.
- Chang'e-4 is also carrying an onboard experiment to test how well plants — specifically potatoes and small flowering Arabidopsis plants — grow on the moon.

Examples from the past

- Photographs taken by earlier spacecraft, including the Soviet Union's Luna 3 and Zond 3 (launched in 1959 and 1965, respectively) and NASA's Lunar Orbiter program (launched in 1966)
- Although spacecraft's have orbited the Moon and imaged the far side, no one has landed there due in part to the technological challenges.

Space race: on China's moon mission

Introduction

- China's landing on the mysterious "dark" side of the moon, the first by any country, gives Beijing a leg up on Washington over big ticket space exploration.
- The data that China obtains on the moon's craters could help it acquire an edge over other countries, including the U.S., in the highly competitive domain of space research.

Advantages of this move over other countries to China

- The Chinese could also steal a march over the Americans by launching advanced rockets, which would explore new frontiers in space.
- Unlike earth, the moon has an abundance of helium-3. In the far future, this can serve as the ideal fuel to power a new generation of spaceships, with the moon as the launchpad, instead of earth.
- The Chinese may have also taken the lead over peers in exploring the possibilities of human habitation on the moon.
- The Yutu-2, the rover of the ongoing Chang'e-4 mission, is programmed to explore the South Pole-Aitken Basin. This vast impact region, 13 km deep and 2,500 km wide, has copious reserves of ice. The promise of water has persuaded international space scientists to peg the site as suitable for a permanent lunar outpost, which is on China's radar.

Areas of Competition

- The promise of the moon's natural resources can add another layer of rivalry between the Chinese and the Americans.

- * Space exploration buffs have considered asteroids as lucrative sources of precious metals such as gold, platinum, silver and iridium in the future.

- * But if the relatively more accessible surface of the moon could yield precious resources, the race for lunar colonisation would begin, providing China a substantial early-mover edge.
- NASA may not actively engage in space collaboration with China leading to further bleak applauds.
- This would amplify the mood within Washington's political class which has been soured by the sentiment to contain China's rise.
- The recent arrest of high profile Huawei executives has also hurt the sentiments of Chinese which could intensify the tussle between technological giants

Conclusion

- A new generation of Chinese and American peace advocates, global citizens and cyber-activists have their task cut out — to step up their game and prevent outer space from becoming another arena of a budding Cold War between Washington and Beijing.

3. DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018

Context

- The Lok Sabha passed a Bill that allows regulated use of DNA technology to which would set the use of DNA technology to establish the identity of persons, including offenders, victims, suspects and undertrials, in connection with criminal and civil matters such as parentage disputes, emigration or immigration, and transplantation of human organs.

Features of the Bill:

- The Bill provides for establishment of national and regional DNA data banks
- Every Data Bank will maintain the following indices:
 - * crime scene index,
 - * suspects' or undertrials' index,
 - * offenders' index,
 - * missing persons' index, and
 - * unknown deceased persons' index.
- The Bill establishes a DNA Regulatory Board.
 - * Every DNA laboratory that analyses a DNA sample to establish the identity of an individual, has to be accredited by the Board.
- The Bill also provides for seeking the consent of individuals when DNA profiling is used in criminal investigations and for identifying missing persons.

	USA	UK	South Africa	Ireland	India (proposed Bill)
Purpose for collecting DNA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal investigations • Identification of missing and deceased persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal Investigations • Identification of missing and deceased persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal Investigations • Identification of missing and deceased persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal Investigations • Identification of missing and deceased persons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal Investigations • Identification of missing and unknown persons • Civil matters
Process of collecting DNA samples from suspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For federal offences, sample can be taken when charged with an offence • Process varies across states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheek swab can be taken when charged with an offence • Intimate samples require consent and authorisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheek swab can be taken on arrest • Intimate sample can be taken only by medical practitioner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheek swab can be taken on order of inspector • Intimate samples require consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written consent required for collecting sample • Magistrate may order collection of samples • Consent not required for offences with penalty above seven years.
Removal/Retention of profiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiles of individuals whose convictions are overturned are to be removed • Profiles of those arrested are removed if charges are dismissed • Varies across states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiles of individuals not convicted can be retained up to three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiles must be removed in case of acquittal • Profiles cannot be retained beyond three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiles are to be removed in three months in case of acquittal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiles of suspects or undertrials to be removed on court order or police report • Profiles in crime scene or missing persons index to be removed on written request
Information apart from identity contained in DNA profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile cannot include physical or medical information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile to be derived from that part of DNA relating to identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No provision

Regulation of database and DNA science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DNA database managed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation • DNA Advisory Board recommends standards for forensic labs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forensic information database Strategy Board governs the National DNA Database • Forensic Science Regulator ensures standards in forensic science services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Database maintained by an authorised officer • National Forensic Oversight and Ethics Board oversees DNA Database and processes related to DNA profiling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) operated the DNA Database System • FSI responsible for processes related to DNA profiling • DNA Database System Oversight Committee that oversees operation of the DNA Database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director to maintain the National DNA Data Bank • DNA Regulatory Board to Supervise labs and provide advice on DNA Data Banks
--	--	---	---	--	--

Significance

- The technology can be used for solving crimes, and to identify missing persons
- Speedier justice delivery.
- Increased conviction rate.
- Bill's provisions will enable the cross-matching between persons who have been reported missing on the one hand and unidentified dead bodies found in various parts of the country on the other, and also for establishing the identity of victims in mass disasters.

4. Gene-Editing

Background

- He Jiankui Chinese researcher shocked the scientific community in 2018 after announcing he had successfully altered the genes of twin girls born in November to prevent them from contracting HIV.
- He had "privately" organised a project team that included foreign staff and used "technology of uncertain safety and effectiveness" for illegal human embryo gene-editing, investigators said.
- Eight volunteer couples — HIV-positive fathers and HIV-negative mothers — signed up to Mr. He's trial
- Speaking at the genome summit in Hong Kong in November, Mr. He said he was "proud" of altering the genes of the babies, given the stigma affecting AIDS patients in the country.
- But such gene-editing work is banned in most countries, including China

Cutting-and-pasting DNA

CRISPR-CAS9 is a technology that allows scientists to essentially cut-and-paste DNA, raising hope of genetic fixes for a disease. However, there are also concerns about its safety and ethics.

- CRISPR is a dynamic, versatile tool that allows us to target nearly any genomic location and potentially repair broken genes. It can remove, add or alter specific DNA sequences in the genome of higher organisms.
- CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) are sections of DNA and are sections of genetic code containing short repetitions of base sequences followed by spacer DNA segments.
- CAS-9 (CRISPR-associated protein 9) is an enzyme. It uses a synthetic guide RNA to introduce a double-strand break at a specific location within a strand of DNA. It is a system used by bacterial cells to recognize and destroy viral DNA as a form of adaptive immunity.

What are the pros of Gene editing?

- CRISPR could be used to modify disease-causing genes in embryos brought to term, removing the faulty script from the genetic code of that person's future descendants as well. Genome editing (Gene editing) could potentially decrease, or even eliminate, the incidence of many serious genetic diseases, reducing human suffering worldwide.
- It might also be possible to install genes that offer lifelong protection against infection.

What are the cons of Gene editing?

- Making irreversible changes to every cell in the bodies of future children and all their descendants would constitute extraordinarily risky human experimentation.
- There are issues including off-target mutations (unintentional edits to the genome), persistent editing effects, genetic mechanisms in embryonic and fetal development, and longer-term health and safety consequences.

- Altering one gene could have unforeseen and widespread effects on other parts of the genome, which would then be passed down to future generations.
- Many consider genome alterations to be unethical, advocating that nature should be left to run its own course.
- Few argue that after permitting human germline gene editing for any reason would likely lead to its ignorance of the regulatory limits, to the emergence of market-based eugenics that would exacerbate already existing discrimination, inequality, and conflict.
- It will become a tool for selecting desired characteristics such as intelligence and attractiveness.

5. Indian Science Congress

The Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) owes its origin to the foresight and initiative of two British Chemists, namely, Professor J. L. Simonsen and Professor P.S. MacMahon.

- To advance and promote the cause of science in India
- To hold an annual congress at a suitable place in India
- To publish such proceedings, journals, transactions and other publications as may be considered desirable.
- To secure and manage funds and endowments for the promotion of Science including the rights of disposing of or selling all or any portion of the properties of the Association.

Background

- The first meeting of the Congress was held in January 1914 at the premises of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta

Context

- Indian Science Congress (ISC)-2019 was held in January 2019, in Jalandhar, Punjab.
- The 106th edition of ISC-2019 is based on the theme 'Future India: Science and Technology'.
- The 100th edition was hosted by the University of Calcutta in January 2013. The theme of the Centenary Congress was, "Science for shaping the future of India."

6. Microsat-R and Kamalsat

Context

- Microsat-R, an imaging satellite for DRDO, and Kamalsat, a small communication satellite developed by students and Space Kidz India will be launched by ISRO.
- The satellites will be carried by a new variant of India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) rocket.

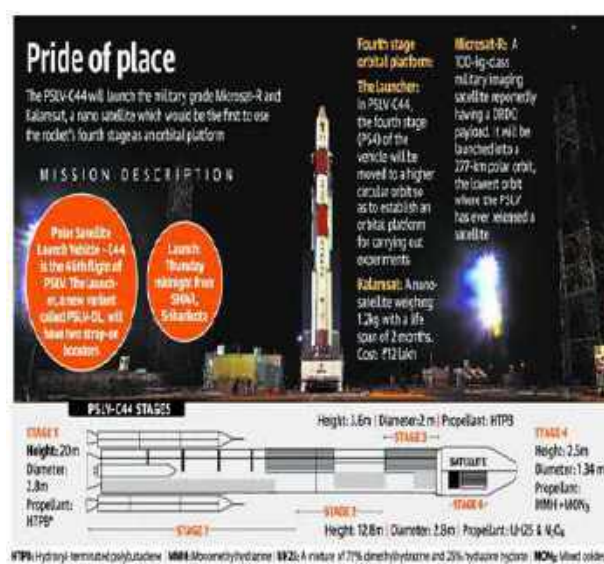
Details

- Microsat-R and its payload come assembled from a handful of laboratories of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and is meant for military use.

- In order to reduce the weight and increase the mass, an aluminum tank is used for the first time in the fourth stage

Kamalsat

- It is a communication satellite with a life span of two months
- It is named after former Indian president Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and was built by an Indian high school student team
- It is the world's lightest and first ever 3D-printed satellite
 - * The nanosatellite is a 10cm cube weighing 1.2 kg
- The satellite cost was about Rs 12 lakh
- Kamalsat will be the first to use the rocket's fourth stage as an orbital platform. The fourth stage will be moved to higher circular orbit so as to establish an orbital platform for carrying out experiments



How was the satellite launch vehicle changed?

- The PSLV is a four-stage engine expendable rocket with alternating solid and liquid fuel. In its normal configuration, the rocket will have six strap-on motors hugging the rocket's first stage.
- However, the launch rocket will have just two strap-on motors for the first time, called the DL mode.
- Moreover, the final fuel stage of the rocket will also play an additional role.

7. Sino-Indian Digital Collaboration Plaza (SIDCOP)

- It is an initiative to bring Indian IT companies and Chinese enterprises closer to each other on a single AI enabled platform
- This is a partnership by National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) with Municipal Governments of Guiyang and Dalian.

Significance

- SIDCOP, which is a boundary-less marketplace offers opportunity for Chinese enterprises in order to assist them in operational optimization and adopting industry best practices in business solutions.
- This platform could be useful to connect with top providers from India and help Chinese enterprises source the right solution providers for their projects.

8. UNNATI (UNISpace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training by ISRO)

- It is another step taken by India scientists to share their expertise and knowledge in the technologies related to the small satellites.
- It is a capacity building programme on Nanosatellites development through a combination of theoretical coursework and hands-on training on Assembly, Integration and Testing (AIT)

SECURITY AND DEFENSE

1. **Arrow 3 Interceptor**

- It is Israel's anti-ballistic missile
- Arrow 3 represents the uppermost tier of Israel's layered missile defenses and can reportedly engage any time of ballistic missile, including higher- and faster-flying intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM).
- The interceptor carries a kinetic kill vehicle that is supposed to physically smash into an incoming threat above the earth's atmosphere, thereby destroying it before it can pose a danger to anyone on the ground.
- The complete system uses the Green Pine family of active electronically scanned array (AESA) radars to spot and track threats.

Context

- Israel, in cooperation with the United States, has conducted a new test of its Arrow 3 ballistic missile defense system

2. **Bodo Accord**

- They are an ethnic and linguistic group speaking Tibeto-Burman languages, residing in the Brahmaputra valley in the northeast of India.
- The Bodos are the largest plains tribe comprising about 30% of the population in Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) straddling four districts – Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri – of western Assam.
- The word 'Bodo' has been derived from the word 'Bod' which means Tibet. The Bodos speak the Bodo language.
- Bodos traditionally practise Bathouism, which is the worshipping of forefathers, known as Obonglaoree.

British Rule and loss of economic and political freedom

- A very complex economic situation had developed in the societies of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam with the taking over of power by the British imperialists.
- This new form of economy unfolded new complexities with serious socio-economic and political ramifications into the medieval society of the Valley.
- Much of the 19th century was a time of economic degradation, displacement and land alienation for the Bodo people. This may also perhaps be seen as a corollary to the loss of political power of the Bodos.

Socio-economic grievances of the Bodos

- The policies and developmental activities of the Government could not bring the desired socioeconomic development for the Bodo community. This impacted immensely on the Bodo psyche

- In the years, following independence, most of the Bodo grievances remained unattended to by the Government. As a result problems of land alienation, poverty, indebtedness, severe unemployment, economic exploitation and cultural and political neglect became increasingly acute among them.
- There were two prime reasons behind the Bodo demand for a separate state.
 - * One was the matter of economic under development of the community
 - * Other of course was the rising political aspirations of the Bodo leaders.

Waves of Protests

- The First trouble across the Bodo domain began in 1930s when Bodo leader Kalicharan Brahma submitted a memorandum to Simon Commission, demanding a separate political set-up for the indigenous and the tribals of Assam.
- The second wave of demand to 'divide Assam 50-50' in the late 1960s fizzled out like the first.
- The third movement turned violent as the 1986-born Bodo Security Force – which was renamed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in 1994 – took over.
 - * The NDFB had a clash with the spearheads of the movement; it wanted secession of Bodoland from India while others wanted statehood within the Constitution.

Solution to the problem

- The Assam government inked a deal with ABSU in 1993 to form the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) but the experiment failed.
 - * The accord delivered little. With no political or financial authority - the word 'political' finds no mention in the Bodoland Accord - the powers and potentialities of the envisaged BAC fell far short of the expectations roused by the agitation leaders.
 - * "The objective of this scheme," the memorandum admitted, "is to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement."
- The representatives of the All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo People's Action Committee (ABSU-BPAC), led a sustained and often violent agitation for the creation of a separate state of 'Bodoland' revived the statehood demand in 1996, the year when Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT) was formed to attain the goal through violent means

- The BLT, not keen on secession, soon became the NDFB's rival.
- In February 2003, the Centre signed the Bodo Accord with BLT, which resulted in the establishment of a Bodoland Territorial Council under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

- The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) is a territorial council in Assam which has jurisdictions in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts.
- The districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baksa came under the BTC administrative area.

Current Context

- There have been representations from different organizations of Bodos to fulfil various outstanding demands.
- So, The Cabinet approved the establishment of a Bodo Museum-cum-language and cultural study center, modernization of existing All India Radio Station and Doordarshan Kendra at Kokrajhar and naming a Superfast Train passing through BTAD as ARONAI Express.
- Relevant Ministries will take the required actions to implement these decisions.
- The State Government will also take necessary measures related to appropriate land policy and land laws, besides setting up of Institutions for Research and Documentation of Customs, Traditions and Languages of indigenous communities.

3. Clause 6 of Assam Accord

Context

- The Union Cabinet chaired approved the setting up of a High Level Committee for implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord

Clause 6

- Clause 6 of the Assam Accord envisaged that appropriate constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

What was the need?

- After Assam agitation of 1979-1985, Assam Accord was signed on 15th August, 1985.
- However, it has been felt that Clause 6 of the Assam Accord has not been fully implemented even almost 35 years after the Accord was signed.
- The Cabinet, therefore, approved the setting up of a High Level Committee to suggest constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards as envisaged in Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.

High Level Committee

- The Committee shall examine the effectiveness of actions since 1985 to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.
- The Committee will hold discussions with all stakeholders and assess the required quantum of reservation of seats in Assam Legislative Assembly and local bodies for Assamese people.
 - * The Committee will also assess the requirement of measures to be taken to protect Assamese and other indigenous languages of Assam,
 - * quantum of reservation in employment under Government of Assam
 - * Other measures to protect, preserve and promote cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people.
- The Composition and Terms of Reference of the Committee will be issued separately by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It is expected that the setting up of the Committee will pave the way for the implementation of the Assam Accord in letter and spirit and will help fulfil longstanding expectations of the Assamese people.

4. Defence India Startup Challenge

Context

- An innovation ecosystem for Defence titled Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) was launched in April 2018. iDEX is aimed at creation of an ecosystem to foster innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries including MSMEs, Startups, Individual Innovators, R&D institutes and Academia and provide them grants/funding and other support to carry out R&D which has good potential for future adoption for Indian defence and aerospace needs.

Defence India Start Up Challenge:

- Taking the iDEX initiative further, Defence India Startup Challenge "has been launched by Ministry of defence in partnership with Atal Innovation Mission, aimed at supporting Startups/MSMEs/Innovators to create prototypes and/or commercialize products/solutions in the area of National Defence and Security.

The vision of the Challenge is two-fold:

- Help create functional prototypes of products/technologies relevant for national security (prototyping), and spur fast-moving innovation in the India defence sector;
- Help new tech products/technologies find a market and early customer (commercialization) in the form of the Indian Defence Establishment.

Who can apply?

- Start-ups, as defined and recognized by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India.

- Any Indian Company incorporated under the Companies Act 1956/2013, primarily a Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) as defined in the MSME Act, 2006.
- Individual innovators are also encouraged to apply (research & academic institutions can use this category to apply).

5. Legacy Person

- National Register of Citizens is a document by the Government which contains the names of bona fide Indian citizens to weed out the illegal migrants.
 - * This process is undertaken by Registrar General of India and monitored by Supreme Court.
- The legacy person is usually the head of a family either the grandfather or the grandmother or the father or the mother.
 - * A legacy person is someone who figures in a set of pre-1971 documents such as the 1951 NRC and voters' lists up to 1971, who an applicant can trace his or her lineage to.

Details

- For inclusion in NRC, a unique legacy code is to be submitted in the form to establish parental linkage before March 25, 1971.
 - * Apart from legacy documents, any of 12 other documents, including land and tenancy record, citizenship certificate, refugee registration certificate, passport, bank or LIC document, education certificate, etc., can be submitted.
 - * For married women, a document issued by the Circle Officer or Gram Panchayat secretary could be furnished.

Concerns

- Change of names, addition or deletion in school names from the current name has become major impediment to prove the credentials and identity of person.
- There are documents mentioned which are mandatory but few have documents which are not accepted like the ESI (Employees' States Insurance) certificate.
- Papers verified by other states authority are not being accepted as a result of previous migration.
- The sudden change of rules during the claims phase and lack of adequate awareness and publicity could rob many in Barak Valley of their citizenship.

6. Sea Vigil Exercise

India is a peninsula and has long coastline. India faces a number of threats and challenges that originate from the sea and which are mainly sub-conventional in nature. These threats and challenges can be categorized under

- Maritime terrorism
- piracy

- smuggling and trafficking;
- infiltration, illegal migration

Context

- Codenamed "Sea Vigil 2019", the Navy, in coordination with the Coast Guard and other stakeholders test the country's preparedness against any attack through the sea route and to check 26/11-style attacks.
- It is the first exercise on such a large scale.

Details

- The exercise aims to comprehensively and holistically validate the efficacy of the measures
- The 'Exercise sea vigil' will involve all stake holders across mainland and Island territories, and will see the participation of all operational ships, submarines and aircraft as well as units of Indian coast guards, Indian Army and the Indian Air Force
- Teams of different agencies have been deployed in all coastal districts to undertake security audit of vulnerable locations such as fish-landing centres, intermediate ports, lighthouses, coastal police stations, control rooms and operations centres
- A wide range of contingencies, including simulated attacks on vital installations and assets along the coastline, will be exercised to assess the response, coordination and information sharing between agencies

7. Suresh Kait Committee by MHA

Context

- The government has set up a tribunal, headed by Delhi High Court Judge Justice Suresh Kait, for adjudicating whether or not two Tripura-based militant outfits should be declared banned organisations under the law.
- The decision has been taken by Home Ministry, exercising the powers conferred under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act

Details

- The two organisations are National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
- A ban of five years was imposed on the two insurgent groups in 2018 for their "violent and subversive activities", which aim at establishment of an independent nation by secession of Tripura from India through armed struggle.
- The Home Ministry said NLFT and ATTF have been engaging in subversive and violent activities, undermining authority of the government and spreading terror among people for achieving their objectives.
- The outfits, formed in 1990 with the objective of "expulsion of all foreigners who entered the state after 1956", were first banned in 1997 following riots involving tribals and non-tribals in Tripura's Khowai subdivision, in which the outfits intervened on behalf of tribals.

Background

- The NLFT was formed in 1989 with Dhananjay Reang as its self-styled chairman.
- Reang was later expelled from the NLFT in 1993 and Nayanbasi Jamatia became the leader of the faction.
- In another split in 2001, a faction led by one Biswamohan Debbarma emerged, which is now the main active wing of the outfit
- The NLFT was outlawed in 1997 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and later under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA).
- The ATTF was formed in 1990 by a group of former Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) under the leadership of Ranjit Debbarma.
- Though the TNV surrendered arms as per a peace accord with the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988, the Ranjit Debbarma faction dissociated themselves and rechristened itself as ATTF.
- The ATTF surrendered en masse in 1993 as per the ATTF Peace Accord but the Ranjit Debbarma faction continued insurgency activities till Debbarma was arrested in Bangladesh in 2012.

8. 1.8 people from India have joined Al Qaeda wing: NIA**Context**

- Around eight men from Kerala and Karnataka are said to have joined Jabat Al-Nusra, a former Al Qaeda outfit, in Syria, a National Investigation Agency (NIA) official said.
- The NIA has registered a case against the suspects and begun investigations. This is the first time that the agency has filed a case against Indians for joining a terrorist outfit other than the Islamic State in Syria.

National Investigation Agency (NIA)

- National Investigation Agency (NIA) is a central agency founded by the Indian Government to combat terror in India. It is the dedicated Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency.
- The organization deals with terror related crimes across states without special permission from the states.
- The Agency came into survival with the enactment of the National Investigation Agency Act 2008 by the Parliament of India.

Its objectives are:

- To set the standards of excellence in counter terrorism and other national security related investigations.
- It strives towards developing a highly trained, partnership oriented workforce to excel in its objective to set excellent standards in counter terrorism and national security investigations.
- It also acts as deterrence for existing and potential terrorist groups/individuals.
- It aims to develop as a storehouse of all terrorist related information.

Spreading terror

An internationally sanctioned terrorist group, the Nusra Front serves as a base for global Al Qaeda operations



Type of organization:
Insurgent, non-state actor, terrorist, transnational, violent

Ideologies and affiliations:
Al Qaeda affiliated group, Islamist, jihadist,

Qutbist, Salafist, Sunni

Place of origin:
Syria and Iraq

Year of origin:
Formed on 2011, declared in January 2012

Founders:
Abu Mohammad al-Golani, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

Area of operation:
Syria and Lebanon

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Africa Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development

- The Africa Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development, was established by the Italian government in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and FAO.
- The new centre is located near the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in central Rome.
- It will help develop and scale-up innovative solutions for sustainable development, implement the goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda and the landmark 2015 Paris Climate Agreement to end reliance on fossil fuels and cap global warming.
- The center has a special focus on Climate Smart Agriculture, access to water, rural women and youth

2. Biological Immortality

- This refers to the biological state where certain organisms like the bristlecone pine and the jellyfish can live forever.
- These organisms can be killed by external causes like injuries caused by harmful predators, catastrophic changes in their environment and fatal diseases, but they do not get fatally affected by the ageing process like in the case of other organisms.
- They are considered to be biologically immortal as they can possibly live forever by endlessly replicating their dying cells. Some scientists, however, have argued that such resistance to ageing may decrease over time.

3. Cinereous Vulture

- It is also known as the black vulture, monk vulture, or Eurasian black vulture
- Cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) draws its name from "monachus", which means hooded (like a monk) in Latin.
- IUCN: Near Threatened
- It is distributed through much of Eurasia

Context

- Cinereous vulture sighted in Jharkhand

4. Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)

- It is an instrument designed to enhance transparency in international climate politics.

- Its aim is to put political and social pressure on those countries that have, until now, failed to take ambitious action on climate protection, and to highlight those countries with best practice climate policies.
- The ranking results are defined by a country's aggregated performance regarding 14 indicators within the four categories "GHG Emissions", "Renewable Energy" and "Energy Use", as well as on "Climate Policy", in a globally unique policy section of the index.
- The CCPI is annually published by Germanwatch, the NewClimate Institute and the Climate Action Network.
- The index evaluates and compares the climate protection performance of 56 countries and the European Union, which are together responsible for more than 90% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

2019 Ranking

- Sweden leads the ranking, followed by Morocco and Lithuania.
- The bottom five in the list were Saudi Arabia, the US, Iran, South Korea and Taiwan.

5. Galapagos Island bans noisy fireworks

Context

- Fireworks have been banned on the Galapagos Islands to protect the archipelago's unique fauna

Details

- It is part of the Republic of Ecuador
- The local council has prohibited the importation, sale, distribution and use of fireworks or pyrotechnics in the Galapagos province
- Those fireworks that produce light but no noise have been excluded from the ban.

Issues

- Animals have suffered from elevated heart rates, nervous stress and anxiety, which have "notably" changed their behavior and affected the survival of species inhabiting this World Heritage Site that belongs to Ecuador.



6. Golden Langur/Trachypithecus geei

- It is a charismatic primate species conspicuous by its lustrous creamy-golden fur
- IUCN: Endangered
- It is endemic to semi-evergreen and mixed-deciduous forests of Indo-Bhutan border,
- Golden langurs came to be known to the western world after its discovery by naturalist E P Gee in the 1950s.
- It has already been listed as Schedule-I species in Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972).

Context

- Assam Environment and Forest Minister Parimal Shuklabaidya announced the success of the Golden Langur Conservation Breeding Programme in the State.

Details

- The golden langur conservation project was undertaken at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati during the 2011-12 fiscal.
- Funded by the Central Zoo Authority, an isolated and undisturbed site within the zoo was chosen to provide a natural habitat for the primates

7. Green – Ag

Context

- The government has launched a Global Environment Facility (GEF) assisted project namely, "Green – Ag: Transforming Indian Agriculture for global environment benefits and the conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes" in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

Details

- The project seeks to mainstream biodiversity, climate change and sustainable land management objectives and practices into Indian agriculture.
- The overall objective of the project is to catalyze transformative change of India's agricultural sector to support achievement of national and global environmental benefits and conservation of critical biodiversity and forest landscapes

- The project will support harmonization between India's agricultural and environmental sector priorities and investments so that the achievement of national and global environmental benefits can be fully realized without compromising India's ability to strengthen rural livelihoods and meet its food and nutrition security.

8. Great Indian Bustard

- It is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in Appendix I of CITES, as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and the National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016).
- It has been identified as one of the species for the recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Historically, the great Indian bustard was distributed throughout Western India, spanning 11 states, as well as parts of Pakistan. Its stronghold was once the Thar desert in the north-west and the Deccan plateau of the peninsula.
- Today, its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan (where it is the state bird) and Gujarat. Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- The Desert National Park (Rajasthan) in Rajasthan is one of the most prominent habitats for the Great Indian Bustard.
- The sewan grassland landscape is the bustard's natural habitat. The bustard, known locally as godawan, flourished for years in these grasslands, but now most of that land is lost to agriculture and other human activities.
- In 2013, the Rajasthan government launched Project Great Indian Bustard, with the aim of constructing breeding enclosures for the species and developing infrastructure to reduce human pressure on its habitats.

Context

- Almost two years after the Rajasthan government proposed setting up of captive breeding centres for the Great Indian Bustards to boost their wild population, the wildlife activists here have called for enforcement of recovery plan for the country's most critically endangered bird.
- The GIB's last remnant wild population of about 50 in Jaisalmer district accounts for 95% of its total world population

9. International Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation

Context

- The 3rd Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation was inaugurated in New Delhi. Third in a series of Stock Taking Conferences, this is the second to be held in India after 2012 and is expected to have wide-ranging discussions on the status of the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) by the 13 tiger range countries besides deliberations on combating wildlife trafficking.

Details:

- This is the second stock-taking conference to be held in India after 2012, wherein progress against resolution adopted by tiger range countries in 2010 at St. Petersburg, Russia, is measured against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as decided by the said countries.
- Global and National Tiger Recovery Programs (GTRP/ NTRP) were formulated by respective tiger range countries as a consequence of this historic decision.

About St. Petersburg Declaration in 2010

- During the St. Petersburg declaration in 2010, tiger range countries had resolved to double tiger numbers across their range by 2022.
- At the time of deliberations at St. Petersburg, India's tiger estimate stood at 1411, which after the third cycle of the All India Tiger Estimation, 2014 has nearly been doubled to 2226.
- This has largely been possible because of strides made against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), predominant among them being legislation to ensure protection of tiger habitat and enhancement of penalties, besides providing a statutory basis for inviolate space.

Tiger range countries:

- The 13 Tiger Range Countries (TRCs) are Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

Why save tigers?

- Tigers are part of our planet's natural heritage, a symbol of Earth's biodiversity. They are a key species, crucial for the integrity of the ecosystems in which they live.
- As top predators, they keep populations of prey species in check, which in turn maintains the balance between herbivores and the vegetation upon which they feed.
- In short, when tigers thrive, the whole ecosystem thrives. This, in turn, provides important financial, cultural and spiritual benefits for local communities who live with or near tigers.

10. Mandal Dam project

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation of several irrigation projects in Jharkhand, including Mandal dam

Details

- The project is situated on North Koel River which is a tributary of Sone River finally joining the river Ganga
- The North Koel Reservoir is located in the most backward tribal areas in Palamau and Garhwa districts of Jharkhand State.
- The project aims to provide irrigation to 111,521 hectares of land annually in the most backward and drought prone areas of Palamu & Garhwa districts in Jharkhand and Aurangabad & Gaya districts in Bihar.

11. National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

Context

- Union Minister of Environment launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) that aims to reduce toxic particulate matter by 2024, taking 2017 as the base year.

Details

The National Clean Air Programme is a mid-term, five-year action plan that includes collaborative, multi-scale and cross-sectoral coordination between relevant Central ministries, state governments and local bodies.

- The overall objective of the programme includes comprehensive mitigation actions for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution besides augmenting the air quality monitoring network across the country and strengthening the awareness and capacity building activities
- The Environment Ministry has announced a budget of Rs 300 crore for two years to tackle air pollution across 102 cities, which have been identified by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) for not meeting the pollution standards set by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.
- Also, city-specific action plans are being formulated for 102 non-attainment cities identified for implementing mitigation actions under NCAP.
- The Smart Cities programme will be used to launch the NCAP in the 43 smart cities falling in the list of the 102 non-attainment cities.
- The programme will be institutionalized by respective ministries and will be organized through inter-sectoral groups, which include, Ministry of Road Transport and Highway, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Heavy Industry, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, NITI Aayog, CPCB, experts from the industry, academia, and civil society.

- Other features of NCAP include the increasing number of monitoring stations in the country including rural monitoring stations, technology support, emphasis on awareness and capacity building initiatives, setting up of certification agencies for monitoring equipment, source apportionment studies, emphasis on enforcement, and specific sectoral interventions.
- Sectoral working groups, national level Project Monitoring Unit, Project Implementation Unit, state-level project monitoring unit, city level review committee under the Municipal Commissioner and DM level Committee in the Districts will also be constituted under NCAP for effective implementation and success of the programme.
- The government has stressed that NCAP is a scheme, not a “legally binding” document with any specified penal action against erring cities.

Mitigation measures

- NCAP details seven mitigation actions. It calls for stringent enforcement through a web-based, three-tier mechanism that will review, monitor, assess and inspect to avoid any form of non-compliance
- It calls for an “extensive plantation drive” at pollution hotspots and execution; however, it is not made clear how much air pollution this will seek to reduce.
- For power sector emissions, it refers to emission standards set by the Ministry of Environment and Forests for Thermal Power Plants in December 2015 to be implemented within a two-year period; it notes that this has since been extended to December 2022.
- For agricultural stubble burning, it highlights the initiatives already in place by way of the central assistance of Rs 1,151 crore for in situ management of crop residue and provides for general action points to be explored.

12. Rag Rag Mein Ganga

- ‘Rag Rag Mein Ganga’ is an account of the spiritual, religious, cultural and socio economic heritage of River Ganga and its present ecological condition which will be telecasted on Doordarshan.
- The travelogue that covers Ganga’s journey from Gomukh to Ganga Sagar
- The 21 episode series is embedded with many take-home messages for the viewers on the need of rejuvenating Ganga. With abundant research inputs, the show will highlight the present situation of Ganga in terms of cleanliness along with the call for action to the people.
- NMCG along with Doordarshan has also designed a quiz titled ‘Meri Ganga’ which tries to cover school children from all zones of India in order to trigger curiosity in the younger generation and to encourage them to take up the cause.
- It is an initiative of Ministry of Water Resources

- * The travelogue and quiz series on Doordarshan is funded by National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under Namami Gange programme.

13. Rat-Hole Mining – Institutional Flaws

- First, the Meghalaya government has no idea what happens inside these rat-hole mines, which are barely 2 ft wide, since mining is a private activity.
 - * Despite the National Green Tribunal ban of April 2014, mining continues in the State.
 - * The question is why does the state allow this archaic mining system, which has complete disregard for human life and safety?
- Second, it was unfortunate that the district administration assumed the miners to be dead on the very day of the tragedy. This assumption was evident in the letter written to the National Disaster Response Force.
- Third, when a mine is flooded, the immediate response, apart from pumping out the water, is to stop further flow of water into it. This requires a hydrologist to scientifically map out the area from where water entered the mine.
 - * Hydrologist from the National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee, arrived only two weeks after the disaster.
 - * So did the divers from the Indian Navy and the 100 HP water pumps from Kirloskar Brothers.
- All these delays happened because there was no one person or agency to coordinate the rescue mission.
- Fourth, Trapped miners were being racially profiled in the minds of the people and the state. Of the 15 miners, only three were locals from the nearby village of Lumthari. The rest were Muslims from Garo Hills, Meghalaya, and Bodoland, Assam.
 - * Their socio-economic profile also worked against them.
 - * They were the poorest of the poor who took a huge risk to enter a mine and dig for coal without any safety gear.

Environmental Concerns

- Rat-hole mining, which started with gusto in the 1980s, has poisoned three rivers in the Jaintia hills: the Myntdu, Lunar and Lukha.
 - * Scientists from the North-Eastern Hill University have found that these rivers have very high acidic levels.
 - * Reports from other agencies suggest that pH of the water and sulphate and iron concentrations indicate significant deterioration of the rivers.

- To add to these woes, cement companies also release their effluents into the rivers. So we now have a deadly cocktail of pollutants being released into the environment.
- Coal mine owners have left thousands of abandoned mines. The State does not insist that they reclaim and afforest those mines
- In 40 years of mining and profiteering, the mine owners have till date not constructed a single hospital or even a school. There is complete disregard for corporate social responsibility because the mines are privately owned by the tribals.

Voices of Civil Society is divided

- Those who care for the environment and for a future for their children and grandchildren have been clamouring for an end to the practice of rat-hole mining and reckless limestone mining.
- On the other hand, the mining elite have mobilised forces to demonise environmental activists.
- The voices are now fragmented
- The other troubling factor is that coal mine owners are insisting that since Meghalaya is a State under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, national mining laws should be exempted here.
 - * The Sixth Schedule was enacted to protect the community rights of tribals from any form of exploitation of their land and resources.
 - * How can it now be used as an instrument to protect an activity that is a private enterprise, that is inhuman, and that violates Article 21 of the Constitution

Conclusion

- How long can the Central government and the highest court of the land allow this to carry on in one part of the country when strict laws are applied elsewhere?

14. Renuka Multipurpose Dam Project

Context

- Union water resources minister signed an agreement with the chief ministers of Haryana, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan for the construction of a multipurpose dam on the Giri River, a tributary of Yamuna, in the Upper Yamuna Basin.

Details

- The Renuka dam project has been conceived as a storage project on the Giri River in Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh.
- The project envisages making a 148-metre-high dam for supplying water to Delhi and other basin States.
- It will also generate 40 MW of power.

Concerns

Renuka dam will displace villages, submerge forestland

- The total agricultural land to be diverted for this project is 1,231 hectares (ha) belonging to 32 villages.
 - * There is growing sense of uncertainty and bleak future among the affected families.
- Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (HPPCL) has only counted reserved forests and endangered trees. The trees that grow in the commonly owned private land (shamlat) of villages, were not counted.
- Ecological flow required for sustainable growth of aquatic system is questioned as a result there would be increase in Pollution

15. SALSA (Subglacial Antarctic Lakes Scientific Access)

- The project aims to uncover new knowledge about Antarctica's subglacial lake
- The SALSA team is hoping to learn more about these frigid alien environments, such as how water might flow in and out of these ice-covered reservoirs, how life is able to survive under such extreme conditions, the environmental factors under which these lakes formed, and the changing conditions of the Antarctic ice sheet.
- Importantly, this mission could also serve as a proxy for future expeditions to the ice-covered moons of Jupiter and Saturn—moons that could potentially harbor alien life.

16. Sarus Crane

- IUCN: Vulnerable
- It is state bird of Uttar Pradesh.
- The Sarus crane is the tallest flying bird in the world, standing at a height of up to 180 cm.
- It is India's only resident breeding crane, as per the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)
- The bird is distinguishable by its red upper neck and white collar

Context

- Its population in Uttar Pradesh has steadily grown since 2013

Stats

- The population of the Sarus crane, has climbed to 15,938 as per the 2018 census (summer).
- This is a jump of 5.2% from 2017, when there were 15,138 Sarus cranes across U.P., as per the State Forest and Wildlife department.

Significance of these birds

- They play a vital role in ecological balance by controlling the population, thereby controlling pests.
- They have significant cultural importance, while also being sociable which can help tourism grow.

Conservation efforts

- General public awareness and efforts of locals, including schoolchildren, who share the fields with these magnificent birds, have “positive role” in conservation.
- Farmers and fisherfolk are involved in the protection of Sarus nests in wetlands as well as rice paddies.
 - * The focus has been on involving farmers in the protection of Sarus nests, as destruction by stray dogs and egg stealing are common threats in the fields.

Threats

- Threats still exist in the form of not just wetland destruction but also electrocution due to power transmission lines in agricultural areas and poisoning.
- Conversion to agriculture, ingestion of pesticides, and the hunting of adults and collection of eggs and chicks for trade, food, medicinal purposes and to help limit damage to crops

17. Seno Ballena Fjord**Context**

- It is the southernmost part of Chile’s Patagonia region
- Scientists in this region are studying whales, dolphins and algae in order to help predict how climate change will affect the world’s oceans.

Details

- This place is like an actual experiment in nature because it allows researchers to conduct experiments in the lab, to know what will happen without imagining it
- The fjord produces the kind of conditions that should be seen in other marine systems in the next few decades, when dramatic changes are expected in the environment due to increased carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere and the melting of glaciers.
- The chilly fjord waters provide one of the most productive marine habitats in the world, where sardines and krill can be found in huge numbers.

Impact

- Climate change poses a threat to ecosystem as the melting of a glacier on Santa Ines island and increased rainfall have led to rising levels of freshwater. If that continues, it would have dire consequences for whales as the plankton they feed on could disappear.
- Under normal circumstances, when there is an abundance of microalgae, these provide food for the zooplankton that subsequently nourish the food chain all the way up to whales
 - * A change in the microalgae could generate changes in the secondary structure (of the marine system) or the animals that feed on these

- For now, researchers have noted a slight drop in the number of humpback whales but an increase in other species such as sea lions, which previously were not present in that region, and dolphins.
- They also found a lower concentration of calcium carbonate, something which can affect the shells of marine organisms such as mollusks or krill, a staple of a whale’s diet.
 - * The crab, a species vital to the economy of the region around the strait, could be affected as it needs calcium to harden its shell.

Significance

- The waters of high latitudes, both in the northern and southern hemispheres, contain a huge amount of biological and physiochemical information that can be used as a basis to take crucial decisions for environmental preservation projects in developed countries

18. Starling

- They are small to medium-sized passerine birds in the family Sturnidae.
 - * passerines are distinguished from other orders of birds by the arrangement of their toes-three pointing forward and one back

Murmuration

- It refers to the phenomenon that results when hundreds, sometimes thousands, of starlings fly in swooping, intricately coordinated patterns through the sky
- The starlings find safety in numbers and their swirling movements confuse predators.

Context

- Starlings wintering in Israel have been putting on a spectacular aerial dance display over the Negev desert

19. Sipahijola Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is a wildlife sanctuary near Agartala in Tripura
- It is a woodland with an artificial lake and natural botanical and zoological gardens.
- It is famous for its clouded leopard enclosures.

20. Turtle Excluder Device**Background**

- Bottom Trawling (Industrial fishing method where a large net with heavy weights is dragged across the seafloor) is used by the commercial shrimp fishing industry.
- In order to catch shrimp, a fine meshed trawl net is needed. This results in large amounts of other marine organisms being also caught as bycatch.

- When a turtle gets caught or entangled in a trawl net, it becomes trapped and is unable to return to the surface.
- Since sea turtles are air-breathing creatures with lungs, they eventually drown.

Details

- A turtle excluder device or TED is a specialized device that allows a captured sea turtle to escape when caught in a fisherman's net.
- These devices modify trawl nets to allow larger animals to escape. These animals may also include stingrays, sharks and sponges

Context

- Many of the first batch olive ridley turtles which choose Andhra Pradesh coast for the annual breeding season are dying before they reach the destination after being trapped in the fishing nets.
- The prime reason for the rise in the deaths is the absence of the 'Turtle Excluder Device'.

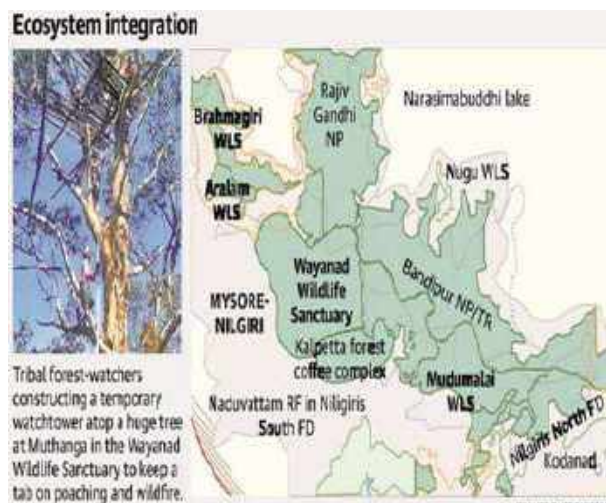
21. Wayanad sanctuary

Context

- With the rise in mercury in the Nilgiri Biosphere, the seasonal migration of wild animals from wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) has begun.
- Mammals such as elephants and gaurs migrate to the sanctuary from the adjacent Bandipur and Nagarhole national parks in Karnataka and the Mudumalai National Park in Tamil Nadu in search of food and water.

Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is an animal sanctuary in Wayanad, Kerala. It is bounded by protected area network of Nagarhole and Bandipur of Karnataka and by Mudumalai of Tamil Nadu.
- Established in 1973, the sanctuary is now an integral part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.
- Vegetation – It is part of the Deccan Plateau and the vegetation is predominantly of the south Indian moist deciduous teak forests. Also, the sanctuary has pastures of the west-coast semi-evergreen trees. The wildlife sanctuary comes under Project Elephant.
- Wayanad district has the largest population of Adivasi in Kerala. Scheduled tribes here include Paniyas, Kurumas, Adiyans, Kurichiyas, Ooralis and Kattunaikkans.
- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the safest havens for different species of vultures like the White-rumped Vultures and the Red-headed Vultures.
- Chrysilla vollupe – Recently, a rare spider Chrysilla vollupe was rediscovered after 150 years, which was believed to be extinct. The Spider belongs to the family of jumping spider (Salticidae). The spider has eight black eyes.



22. Yamuna River Pollution

Context

- Residents of unauthorized colonies dump trash directly into the river. This has led to increased choking of drains and pollution in river.
- Lack of alternatives and provision of basic amenities has led the residents take up with option.

Shailaja Chandra Committee constituted by NGT

- Direct discharge of "vast quantities" of sewage into the river has made the Delhi section of the Yamuna "the most polluted section"
 - * Lack of proper tapping of the sewage being discharged into the river that contributes most to pollution in the Yamuna
- There are no garbage trucks to pick the solid wastes at resident colonies. So solid waste accumulation along the river has become a norm.
 - * Solid waste generated from the unauthorized colonies is dumped into the river, further deteriorating the river's health
- While water is supplies, the pressure is so low at times it takes two-three hours to fill one bucket! This make the residents wash clothes in the river itself

Recommendation

- Proper operation and maintenance of existing sewers
- Trapping of sewage and interception of sewage before outfall into the river apart from providing proper sewage system in unauthorized colonies.

23. Parliamentary committee irked by States' insensitivity to Western Ghats

Context

- The Committee on Government Assurances in the Rajya Sabha has said that the states of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, have failed to mark Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) in the Western Ghats.

- The committee went on to say that inspite of presence of recommendations of two committees led by Madhav Gadgil and K. Kasturirangan, the states have not earmarked as 'no-go' zones for polluting activities and deforestation, and large-scale deforestation, mining, and construction are continuing unabated, hurting the ecology of the Western Ghats.

Committee on Government Assurances

- There shall be a Committee on Government Assurances to scrutinize the assurances, promises, undertakings, etc., given by Ministers, from time to time, on the floor of the Council and to report on-
 - a) the extent to which such assurances, promises, undertakings, etc., have been implemented and
 - b) when implemented whether such implementation has taken place within the minimum time necessary for the purpose
- The Committee shall consist of ten members who shall be nominated by the Chairman in Rajyasabha
- The Committee consists of 15 members nominated by the Speaker in loksabha.

Details

- Over 56,000 kilometres of ecologically sensitive areas (ESA) in the Western Ghats could not be earmarked as 'no-go' zones due to State governments' insensitivity,
- The panel has urged the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to constitute a committee to address the issues and grievances of local people.

24. Exotic trees eating up Western Ghat's grasslands

Context

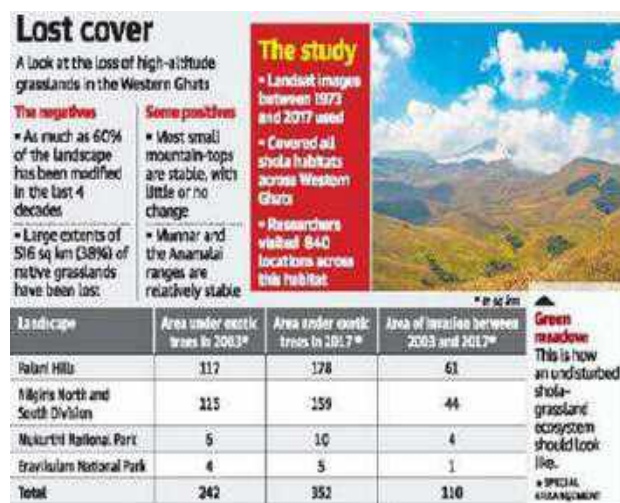
- According to a study published in the international journal Biological Conservation, the high-altitude grasslands of the Western Ghats Over the last four decades, has lost almost one-fourth of these grasslands and primarily due to exotic invasive trees.

Background

- When satellite images revealed to a team including scientists from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER, Tirupati) grassland loss in Tamil Nadu's Palani hills in early 2018, they decided to study how shola-grasslands (characterised by patches of stunted evergreen shola trees in the valleys and grasslands on hill slopes) across the Ghats – from the Baba Budan Hills in Karnataka to Tamil Nadu's Ashambu Hills – changed in extent between 1972 and 2017.
- The satellite images they accessed reveal that 60% of the shola-grassland landscape has changed; almost 40% (516 km²) of native high-elevation grasslands have disappeared.

Details

- Most of this loss occurred on the mountain tops of the Nilgiri, Palani and Anamalai hill ranges, which comprise more than half of the Ghat's shola-grassland ecosystems, primarily due to the expansion of exotic trees (pine, acacia and eucalyptus).
- Broadly, shola-grassland ecosystems in Tamil Nadu showed the highest rates of invasion.
- Despite this, there's some good news: shola forests have remained "relatively unchanged" over these years. The Anamalai-Munnar areas have also remained stable during this time.



Way forward

- All possible efforts must be made to conserve the remaining grassland tracts
- The immediate reaction would be to remove all exotics including mature plantations from grasslands but that should not be done as there would be ecological imbalance.

25. Survey spots 3 new bird visitors

Context:

- A waterbird survey conducted in the Upper Kuttanad region has recorded 16,767 birds of 47 continental and local species.

Background:

- The survey was jointly organized by the Social Forestry wing of the Forest Department, Kottayam Nature Society, and Alappuzha Natural History Society.
- The Asian Waterbird Census is part of the global International Waterbird Census carried out each January as a voluntary activity.
- The survey would help understand
 - the changes to wetland systems,
 - change in migratory pattern of birds,
 - Impact of climate change.

- The information would be used to promote the designation and management of protected areas, Ramsar Sites, Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, and so on.

Key findings:

- Three new species, Greater flamingo, Grey-headed lapwing, and Blue-cheeked bee-eater were spotted by the survey, conducted as part of the annual Asian Water bird Census.
- However, compared to the previous years, the number of winged visitors to the region has declined drastically. In 2017, the survey recorded 28,198 birds whereas 41,576 were spotted last year.
- According to the survey, the August deluge and subsequent delay in preparing paddy fields for the Pancha crop season could be the reason behind the sharp fall.

Asian Waterbird Census (AWC)

- The AWC was initiated in 1987 in the Indian subcontinent and since has grown rapidly to cover major region of Asia, from Afghanistan eastwards to Japan, Southeast Asia and Australasia.
- The AWC is an integral part of the global waterbird monitoring programme, the International Waterbird Census (IWC) coordinated by Wetlands International.
- It runs in parallel with other regional programmes of the International Waterbird Census in Africa, Europe West Asia, the Neotropics and the Caribbean.
- Its objectives are:
 - * to obtain information on an annual basis of waterbird populations at wetlands in the region during the non-breeding period of most species (January), as a basis for evaluation of sites and monitoring of populations
 - * to monitor on an annual basis the status and condition of wetlands
 - * to encourage greater interest in waterbirds and wetlands amongst citizens
- The information collected is available to a wide range of government agencies and non-government organizations and contributes to conservation activities from the local to global level.

26. NITI Aayog's "Strategy for New India@75"

Context:

- NITI Aayog recently released the document "Strategy for New India@75" with the purpose of defining clear objectives for 2022-23 in a diverse range of 41 different areas. This aspirational strategy aims to achieve a 'New India' by 2022, when the country celebrates its 75th year of Independence.

"Strategy for New India@75":

- 'Strategy for New India @ 75' has identified 41 different areas that require either a sharper focus on implementing the flagship schemes already in place or a new design and initiative to achieve India's true potential.
- Each chapter summarizes the current status of the sector, takes full cognizance of the progress made thus far and spells out the objectives.
- It then identifies the binding constraints and proposes measures to address these constraints.
- The approach is believed to provide an inventory of readily implementable measures for the government departments and agencies both in the central and state governments.
- The focus of the strategy is to further improve the policy environment in which private investors and other stakeholders can contribute their fullest towards achieving the goals set out for New India 2022.

Issue:

- There are serious doubts if the strategy envisaged in the document relating to ecological and livelihood concerns, will be any different from the crisis-ridden society we live in today.

Editorial Analysis:

- In the chapter focusing on ecological and related livelihood concerns, there are positive directions vis-à-vis the environment, such as a major focus on renewable energy, organic farming (with the zero budget natural farming model developed by Maharashtrian farmer Subhash Palekar being singled out for national application), increasing forest cover, and reducing pollution and waste.
- A chapter titled 'Sustainable environment' states: "The objective is to maintain a clean, green and healthy environment with peoples' participation to support higher and inclusive economic growth through sustainable utilization of available natural resources."
- Its focus is primarily on air pollution, solid waste management, water pollution, and forestry.
- The strategy has many progressive objectives. It follows the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Inclusion, sustainability, participation, gender equality and other buzzwords find mention.

What are the missing issues?

For more than three decades, governments have been promising that with environmental safeguards, growth can be made sustainable. There is no indication that this is anywhere near achievable, much less achieved. In 2008, the Confederation of Indian Industry indicated that India was already using twice of what its natural resources could sustain, and that more than half its biocapacity had already been eroded. Things are likely only worse now. No party in power has shown what magic wand it can use to suddenly make growth sustainable. Indeed, no country in the world has been able to do this.

- From amongst the much larger number of environmental issues India faces, air pollution, solid waste management, water pollution, and forestry are only given much spotlight.
- Some other issues such as arresting land degradation and soil erosion, and water conservation are also mentioned elsewhere.
- But issues that need urgent attention such as increasing presence of toxic chemicals around us, the need to conserve a range of non-forest ecosystems do not find mention.
- Since colonial times, forests have remained predominant in the minds of decision-makers, as indicated by the fact that India still has only a Forest Department and no dedicated entity for grassland, marine and coastal, wetland, mountain, and desert conservation.
- An integrated, comprehensive view on how ecological issues can be integrated into all sectors is absent indicating that these issues are still not core to the mindset of the planners.
- There is total absence of an understanding that the current form and goal of economic growth is inherently unsustainable.

Alarming features:

Examples of the internal contradictions in the document.

- Mining:
 - * One of the biggest ecological and social disasters in India is mining, especially the large-scale open-cast type.
 - * NITI Aayog ignores this when it proposes a doubling of the extent of mining.
 - * The only concession is the suggestion to bring in “cutting-edge” technology to “limit environmental damage”, which will most likely not solve the fundamental need to deforest areas.
- Tourism:
 - * Another major sector with horrendous environmental impacts is tourism, as witnessed by the hill stations and the ruin that areas like Ladakh, Kutch and the island regions are facing.
 - * Yet, NITI Aayog recommends doubling the number of domestic tourist visits to over 3,200 million from 1,614 million in 2016.
- River Valley Projects:
 - * It also urges prompt completion of a host of mega river valley projects that have proved to be ecological nightmares, including Pancheshwar in the fragile Himalaya, the Ken-Betwa link in Madhya Pradesh, and dozens in the Northeast that are going to choke up rivers and are being pushed ahead despite strong local opposition.
- Agriculture:
 - * The agriculture chapters are in fact full of fault lines.
 - * For all the mention of organic farming, there is no clear direction to phase out chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
 - * The objective of sustainable farming is undermined by the following: “Phase out old varieties of seeds and replace them with hybrid and improved seeds”. This is the kind of Green Revolution approach that has caused huge loss of agricultural biodiversity and resilience amongst small farmers.
 - * There is also no focus on dryland farming though most farmers are engaged in this.
 - * There is positive mention of organic farming models for replication, but nothing on the amazing work of dryland farmers (such as the Dalit women of the Deccan Development Society in Telangana) showing productive, sustainable, biodiverse agriculture with millets and women as the fulcrum.
- Infrastructure Projects:
 - * One of the most alarming features of the document is its stress on rapid, single-window clearance of infrastructure and other projects.
 - * Any decent ecological assessment of a project needs a year of study (over all seasons), so the 180 days limit it suggests will mean short-cuts.
 - * This rush also means compromising on crucial processes of social assessment, public hearings, and participatory decision-making, as already seen in the last few years.
 - * There is nothing on the need to seek consent from local communities, though this is mandated under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.
 - * Governments in the last few years have a dismal record of safeguarding the environment and the livelihoods of Adivasis and other communities.
 - * They have found ways to bypass constitutional and policy safeguards these vulnerable sections are supposed to enjoy.
- Conclusion:
 - * NITI Aayog’s strategy for 2022 is replete with environmental and livelihood related contradictions.
 - * It is alarming that the most important “driver” for the lofty goals of the strategy is economic growth.
 - * While there is great focus on forest conservation, there is an urgent need to conserve non-forest ecosystems such as grasslands, wetlands, mountains, and deserts.

- * Without a strong, unambiguous commitment to upholding these protections, and putting communities at the centre of decision-making, India @ 75 is going to be an even more unequal, unjust, and conflict-ridden society than India @ 50.
- * We need to learn from the many alternative initiatives for food, water, energy, housing, education and health existing across India, which show the way to more just and sustainable livelihoods and ways of living.

27. **9th International Conference on micro irrigation to be held at Aurangabad**

Context:

- Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India is organizing the 9th International Micro Irrigation Conference on Modern Agriculture at Aurangabad in Maharashtra. in association with International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID), Indian National Committee on Surface Water (INCSW) and WAPCOS Limited.

About the event:

- The event will be a multi-disciplinary dialogue in the form of a conference discussing issues related to micro irrigation for modern agriculture and various related issues like new techniques in micro irrigation for increased crop productivity, micro irrigation in cluster level farming etc.
- A large group of eminent international and national experts and local farmers will be sharing their experiences in the fields of latest developments in micro irrigation technology to enhance crop production and water management for optimal use in agriculture, technical and sociological interventions for sustainable water, food & agriculture.
- The Conference will provide a forum for discussions and deliberation through seminars, exhibitions and sessions and will serve to build awareness regarding large-scale use of micro irrigation, strategies for water conservation, advanced crop technology, engineering techniques, etc.

28. **'Plastic waste imports to India go up'**

Context:

- In spite of a ban on the import of plastic waste into India, the influx of PET bottles has quadrupled from 2017 to 2018 thanks to legal loophole, says a Delhi-based environmentalist organisation, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Smriti Manch (PDUSM).
- "Indian firms are importing plastic scraps from China, Italy, Japan and Malawi for recycling and the imports of PET bottle scrap & flakes have increased from 12,000 tonnes in FY 16-17 to 48,000 tonnes in FY 17-18 growing @ 290%. India has already imported 25,000 MT in the first 3 months of FY 18-19," says a note by the organisation.

Details of the issue

- Government and industry estimates suggest that India consumes about 13 million tonnes of plastic and recycles only about 4 million tonnes.
- A lack of an efficient waste segregation system and inadequate collection is the root cause, according to experts, for much of the plastic not making its way to recycling centres.
- To incentivise domestic plastic recycling units, the government had banned the import of plastic waste, particularly PET bottles in 2015. In 2016, an amendment allowed such imports as long as they were carried out by agencies situated in Special Economic Zones. It's this loophole that's been exploited.



Plastic Pollution

- Plastics are non-biodegradable, synthetic polymers. They are made-up of long chain hydrocarbons with additives and can be moulded into finished products.
- These polymers are broken into monomers such as ethylene, propylene, vinyl, styrene and benzene etc.
- Finally, these monomers are chemically polymerized into different categories of plastics.
- Two broad classes of plastic-related chemicals are of critical concern for human health—bisphenol-A or BPA, and additives used in the synthesis of plastics, which are known as phthalates
- Petroleum-based plastic is not biodegradable and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean.
- Since plastic does not decompose into a natural substance like soil, it degrades (break down) into tiny particles after many years. In the process of breaking down, it releases toxic chemicals (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic) which make their way into our food and water supply.
- These toxic chemicals are now being found in our bloodstream. Causing cancer, infertility, birth defects, impaired immunity and many other ailments.

Penetration of Plastic Pollution

- A major threat to oceans according to a 2017 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) report, micro plastics are estimated to constitute up to 30% of marine litter polluting the oceans.
- The ingestion of microplastics is very dangerous for humans as these substances contain high concentrations of toxic chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyls.
- People living along rivers and coastlines in China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam are the most impacted by plastic pollution.
- Low-income communities face more health impacts near plastic production sites, have greater exposure to toxins and waste, and bear the brunt of the impacts of improper plastic disposal and incineration.
- Henderson Island in the South Pacific is the most plastic polluted of any island recorded to date.
- Studies show, eliminating all plastic, or using alternative materials such as paper and glass, could be more harmful to the environment than plastic itself.

Proposed alternatives and their limitations

- Compostable plastic bags – Compostable plastic cannot degrade in nature; it has to be separated from other waste and heated to 70 degrees Celsius at an industrial facility.
- Bioplastics – May not necessarily be biodegradable and may require very specific conditions to break down. They also do not solve the litter or throwaway culture problem
- Glass containers – Studies show that making and moving glass bottles uses nearly five times more energy than plastic.
- Paper bags – considered greener than plastic. Analyses of both materials show plastic bag production causes significantly less air and water pollution.
- Micro plastic – Study has not shown if consuming micro plastic is harmful or not. It's an emerging area of research, one the World Health Organization is working to assess.
- Incineration – Creates other pollution and does not address the overproduction problem.
- Focusing on end of life like recycling or disposal – We can't recycle our way out of this crisis.
- Clean up – While cleanup efforts help reduce litter problems, they do not address the source of the problem and ignore the unseen plastic pollution – micro plastics.
- Throwaway alternatives – Replacing one single-use item with another does not necessarily solve the problem or help to address our throwaway culture.

29. Half done (Plastic Waste Management)**The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 aim to:**

- Increase minimum thickness of plastic carry bags from 40 to 50 microns and stipulate minimum thickness of 50 micron for plastic sheets also to facilitate collection and recycle of plastic waste,
- Expand the jurisdiction of applicability from the municipal area to rural areas, because plastic has reached rural areas also;
- To bring in the responsibilities of producers and generators, both in plastic waste management system and to introduce collect back system of plastic waste by the producers/brand owners, as per extended producers responsibility;
- To introduce collection of plastic waste management fee through pre-registration of the producers, importers of plastic carry bags/multi-layered packaging and vendors selling the same for establishing the waste management system;
- To promote use of plastic waste for road construction as per Indian Road Congress guidelines or energy recovery, or waste to oil etc. for gainful utilization of waste and also address the waste disposal issue; to entrust more responsibility on waste generators, namely payment of user charge as prescribed by local authority, collection and handing over of waste by the institutional generator, event organizers.

Editorial Analysis:

- India won global acclaim for its "Beat Plastic Pollution" resolve declared on World Environment Day 2018, under which it pledged to eliminate single-use plastic by 2022.
- So far, 22 States and Union Territories have joined the fight, announcing a ban on single-use plastics such as carry bags, cups, plates, cutlery, straws and thermocol products.
- Puducherry will implement a ban from March 1, 2019.
- It is important to note that where firm action has been taken, positive results have followed. A Bengaluru waste collective estimates that the volume of plastic waste that they collect dropped from about two tonnes a day to less than 100 kg.
- Voluntary initiatives are having an impact in many States, as citizens reduce, reuse and sort their waste. However,, this is only a small start.
- Waste plastic from packaging of everything from food, cosmetics and groceries to goods delivered by online platforms remains unaddressed.
- It will take a paradigm shift in the manner in which waste is collected and handled by municipal authorities to change this.
- Experts point out that governments must start charging the producers for their waste, and collect it diligently, which will lead to recovery and recycling.

- But the depressing reality is that State and local governments are unwilling to upgrade their waste management systems, which is necessary to even measure the true scale of packaging waste.
- The Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 are clear that producers, importers and brand owners must adopt a collect-back system for the plastic they introduce into the environment. Although the rules were notified in 2016, and later on, amended and given high visibility by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, not much has been done to take the process forward.

Concluding Remarks:

- Experts opine that at the very least, local bodies should consult manufacturers or importers to assess the problem.
- Delaying such a measure has created the anomalous situation of small producers of plastics facing the ban, while more organised entities covered by the Extended Producer Responsibility clause continue with business as usual.
- Such enforcement failure is not an argument in favour of relaxing the prohibition on flimsy plastics that are typically used for under 15 minutes, but to recover thousands of tonnes of waste that end up in dumping sites.
- Cities and towns need competent municipal systems to achieve this. Again, there is little doubt that plastics play a major role in several industries, notably in the automotive, pharmaceutical, health care and construction sectors.
- However, it is the fast moving consumer goods sector that uses large volumes of packaging, posing a higher order challenge. This calls for urgent action.
- Experts point out that governments should show the same resolve here, as they have done in imposing the ban.

30. Protest against proposed bird sanctuary in Manipur

Context

- The Manipur government's plan to set up a bird sanctuary at the Loktak lake in Bishnupur district has met with stiff opposition from the villagers in nearby areas.
- A large number of residents of Thingnunggei village took out a massive procession against the government's proposal on Sunday.

Background

- Thousands of migratory birds flock to the Loktak lake, the largest freshwater lake in north-eastern India, every year. However, in the past few years there has been a sharp decline in the number of migratory birds coming to the lake.

- Reports indicate that bird poachers are active in the area, targeting the winged guests. Officials of the forest department's wildlife wing say in view of the widespread bird poaching at the lake, setting up of the sanctuary is a must.
- Birdwatchers on the other hand blame human intrusion, bird poaching and hydroelectric power project near the lake for the decline in the number of migratory birds and brow-antlered deer in the Keibul Lamjao national park in the vicinity.
- "The villagers of Thingnunggei are poor and they have no other means of earning a livelihood except for catching fish and plucking vegetables from the lake. If fishing is banned in the lake, the villagers would starve. We are all for protection of birds, most of whom are migratory, but the new scheme should not be implemented at the cost of the poor villagers," said one of the protesters.

Loktak Lake

- Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in North-East India. It is located in the Bishupur District of Manipur.
- The most unique feature of the Loktak lake is the presence of a series of floating islands locally known as phumdis. These are massive heterogeneous masses of soil, vegetation and organic matter in different stages of decomposition
- Keibul Lamjao National Park is located at the southwestern part of the lake. It is home to the endangered Manipuri brow-antlered deer, Sangai.
- Loktak Lake was designated for the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Under Ramsar Convention) in 1990.
- In 1993 it was inscribed in the Montreux Record of sites whose ecological character has changed, is changing, or is about to change as a result of human interference.

Threats to Loktak Lake

- Waste products from towns and cities and sediments brought by the rivers to the lake is a major concern.
- "floating huts" or "phumshang" built by local fishermen have disrupted the environment of the lake by polluting and shallowing the lake.
- Introduction of new and alien species in the 1980s by Government of Manipur has led to loss of indigenous species of the Lake.
- Detergents, soaps and other phosphates and nitrates containing chemicals, which are brought down by the rivers to this lake, cause 'eutrophication' of the lake.

Issues faced by local communities:

- Due to environmental degradation, there has been a continuous decline in fish species which have impacted the livelihood of fishermen community of Loktak.

- Another major challenge for Loktak Lake dwellers has been eviction after the enactment of Loktak Protection Act, 2006. The Act prohibits dwellings on the phumdis on the lake and the dwellers are termed "occupiers".

31. Jumbos to patrol Odisha's Satkosia Tiger Reserve

Context:

- Patrolling in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve is set to be strengthened as two trained elephants would be deployed there.

Background:

- As per the guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, a few trained elephants have to be deployed in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve.
- The two elephants are being brought from the Similipal Tiger Reserve.
- This step has been undertaken for resuming the ambitious tiger reintroduction programme in Satkosia.
- The tiger reintroduction programme in STR had run into rough weather following the death of India's first inter-State translocated tiger last year.
- Trained elephants will help ground-level forest guards patrol deep in the forest where jeeps cannot go.

Satkosia Tiger Reserve:

- Satkosia Tiger Reserve was established in 1976 as a wildlife sanctuary. The area was declared as Satkosia Tiger Reserve in 2007.
- This tiger reserve spreads over 4 districts like Angul, Cuttack, Nayagarh and Boudh along the Mahanadi River in Odisha.
- Satkosia is the meeting point of two bio-geographic regions of India; the Deccan Peninsula and the Eastern Ghats, contributing immense biodiversity.

32. Cow urine may be adding to global warming

Context:

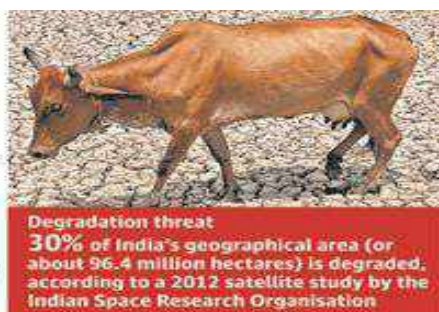
- The urine from the ruminant is a source of nitrous oxide emissions (N₂O), a gas that is 300 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

Details of the study

Bovine twist

Ammonia: Cattle and buffaloes were the largest contributors for ammonia from manure, accounting for 56.1% and 23.6% of emissions respectively

Nitrous oxide: Cattle contributed the highest proportion (42.3%) of nitrous oxide emissions followed by buffalo (28.1%), goats (15.5%), sheep (9.5%) and other species (4.6%)



- Most times, when cow urine is used in degraded pastures, which are also seen in vast tracts of land in India, N₂O emissions are tripled, says a study conducted in Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago, and published in the latest edition of the peer-reviewed Scientific Reports.
- The cattle and livestock are a significant source of methane, a greenhouse gas, and therefore a contributor to global warming, is well-known. However, the role of cow urine is less understood.
- Dung and urine are commonly mixed together for manure in Indian fields. Since, India also hosts the world's largest livestock population, as well as significant tracts of degraded land, the findings may have a bearing on nitrogen emissions from Indian fields.
- A 2012 satellite study by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said that about 30% of India's geographical area (or about 96.4 million hectares) is degraded.
- Degraded pastures not only affect food security and the livelihood of farmers today, but affect the livelihood of future farmers because they emit more gases that cause global warming
- Degraded grasslands emitted more N₂O than healthy pastures because the vegetation in the latter took up some of the reactive nitrogen compounds and only the leftovers were emitted.

Top ammonia-emitting States

Uttar Pradesh (12.7%)
Madhya Pradesh (8.7%)
West Bengal (8.4%)

Top nitrous oxide-emitting States

Uttar Pradesh (13.1%)
Madhya Pradesh (8%)
Maharashtra (7.5%)

HEALTH ISSUES

1. Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)

- It is a viral fever which is caused by a virus belonging to the family Flaviviridae, that is a tick-borne hemorrhagic fever
- Tick-borne diseases, which afflict humans and other animals, are caused by infectious agents transmitted by tick bites.
- KFD was first identified in 1957, when an illness occurred in monkeys in Kyasanur Forest area of Shimoga district in Karnataka
- The disease first manifested as an epizootic outbreak among monkeys killing several of them in the year 1957. Hence the disease is also locally known as monkey disease or monkey fever

Transmission

- The virus spreads through parasitic tick *Haemaphysalis spinigera*, a forest tick.
- There are a variety of animals thought to be reservoir hosts for the disease, including porcupines, rats, squirrels, mice and shrews
- Human infection has occurred through handling of dead monkeys that were infected.
- The increase in number of new foci and cases indicates that ecobiological changes due to deforestation leading to spread of KFD virus to newer geographical areas.

Symptoms

- The symptoms of the disease include a high fever with frontal headaches, followed by haemorrhagic symptoms, such as bleeding from the nasal cavity, throat, and gums, as well as gastrointestinal bleeding
- Other symptoms include vomiting, muscle stiffness, tremors, absent reflexes, and mental disturbances

2. Lymphatic Filariasis/ Elephantiasis

- It is a neglected tropical disease.
- It's caused by parasitic worms
- According to the WHO, infection occurs when filarial parasites are transmitted to humans through mosquitoes.
- The infection is usually acquired in childhood, causing hidden damage to the lymphatic system.

Context

- Maharashtra is all set to roll out the World Health Organization (WHO)-recommended triple-drug therapy for lymphatic filariasis to speed up elimination of the disease.

Details

- The State currently has a two-drug regimen consisting of diethylcarbamazine citrate and albendazole.
- In the triple-drug regimen, one more drug called ivermectin will be added.
- The drugs are distributed in endemic areas through a Mass Drug Administration (MDA) exercise, which is carried out once a year.
- The MDAs are better for prevention as those living in filariasis-endemic areas may be carrying the infection without symptoms. The drugs, which are safe to be taken for a non-infected person as well, kill the microfilariae (minute larvae) and clear intestinal worms if any.

3. Malaria Control

Context:

The World Health Organisation's World Malaria Report of 2018 turned the spotlight on India's recent progress against malaria. India is the only country among the 11 highest-burden countries that saw substantial progress in reducing disease burden: it saw a 24% decrease in 2017 compared to 2016. This shows that India has assumed a leadership role in advancing global efforts to end malaria. The country's success provides hope to the other highest-burden countries to tackle malaria head-on.

Details

- India's progress in fighting malaria is an outcome of concerted efforts to ensure that its malaria programme is country-owned and country-led, even as it is in alignment with globally accepted strategies.
- The turning point in India's fight against malaria came at the East Asia Summit in 2015, when it pledged to eliminate the disease by 2030.
 - * Following this public declaration, India launched the five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination.
 - * This marked a shift in focus from malaria "control" to "elimination".
 - * The plan provides a roadmap to achieve the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.
 - * The plan requires more than ₹10,000 crore.

Lessons from Odisha:

- Among the States, Odisha has emerged as an inspiration in the fight against malaria.
- In recent years it has dramatically scaled-up efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat malaria through its Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative, which has produced impressive results in a short span of time.
 - * DAMaN aims to deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State.
 - * The initiative has in-built innovative strategies to combat asymptomatic malaria.
 - * DAMaN has been accorded priority in the State's health agenda. There is financial commitment for a five-year period to sustain and build on the impact created by the initiative.
 - * In 2017, accredited social health activists (ASHAs) helped distribute approximately 11 million bed nets, which was enough to protect all the residents in areas that were at highest risk. This included residential hostels in schools.
- As a result of its sustained efforts, Odisha recorded a 80% decline in malaria cases and deaths in 2017.

Way forward:

The new country-driven 'high burden to high impact' plan to reduce disease burden in the 11 countries reflects the global sentiment that business as usual is no longer an option when it comes to fighting the disease.

- Adequate investment combined with coordinated action between governments, civil society and philanthropic donors is imperative to achieve this goal.
- Since health is a State subject, State governments across the country shoulder a special responsibility in tackling the disease.
- India needs to tighten malaria surveillance, invest more in campaign.

4. National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases (NPTRD)

Context

- The center has suspended the National Policy for Treatment of Rare Diseases (NPTRD) and has formed committee under the chairmanship of Director General of Health Services, Dr S Venkatesh, to draft a revised policy

What is a rare Disease?

- A rare disease is a health condition of low prevalence that affects a small number of people compared with other prevalent diseases in the general population.
- It is estimated that globally around 6000 to 8000 rare diseases exist with new rare diseases being reported in the medical literature regularly.

- However, 80% of all rare disease patients are affected by approximately 350 rare diseases. There is no universally accepted definition of a rare disease. Different countries define rare diseases differently.
- The most common rare diseases recorded in India are Haemophilia, Thalassemia, sickle-cell anaemia and primary immuno deficiency in children, auto-immune diseases, Lysosomal storage disorders such as Pompe disease, Hirschsprung disease, Gaucher's disease, Cystic Fibrosis, Hemangiomas and certain forms of muscular dystrophies.

Complex nature of diseases

- The field of rare diseases is intricate, heterogeneous, continuously evolving and suffers from a deficit of medical and scientific knowledge.
- So far about 450 rare diseases have been recorded in India. Globally as well as in India, rare diseases pose a significant challenge to public health systems in terms of –
 - * difficulty in collecting epidemiological data,
 - * making correct and timely diagnosis,
 - * which in turn impedes arriving at cost estimations,
 - * difficulty in research and development,
 - * Complex tertiary level management involving long term care and rehabilitation and unavailability and prohibitive cost of treatment.
- Diagnosis of a rare condition may take upto several years, owing to difficulty in diagnostic modalities and lack of awareness among doctors. For many rare diseases, no diagnostic method exists, or diagnostic facilities are unavailable

Background

- The NPTRD was approved in May 2017 on the orders of the Delhi High Court.
- The recommendations of the three major committees and sub-committees were used to formulate policy going beyond just treatment and suggesting measures towards awareness, prevention, research and development of therapies and orphan drugs and issues of health insurance.
- The policy set out a road map for the immediate treatment of affected patients along with concrete implementation mechanisms.
- It recommended the setting up of a
 - * technical-cum-administrative committee (at the Central and State levels), and
 - * An immediate corpus of funds (₹100 crore) for treatment.

- The policy also stated the role of the Union Health Ministry by suggesting that a rare disease cell should be set up within the Ministry and headed by a joint secretary.

Concern

- The Centre filed an affidavit in the Delhi High Court stating that the current policy for rare diseases needed to be reframed due to challenges in implementation and costs.
- An interim arrangement of one-time financial assistance for treatment of patients below poverty line is no solution.
 - * The exorbitant cost of treatment per patient, which ranges anywhere from ₹25 lakh and ₹4 crore per year, is out of reach even for middle-class families.
 - * In India, out-of-pocket health-care expense is a key driver of poverty, and more so in families with those affected by a rare disease, as they have to run from pillar to post for diagnosis and treatment. The government must understand the financial burden of rare diseases and extend help to all patients.
- To coordinate policy implementation across all States, a State rare disease cell under the State Ministry of Health and Family Welfare could have been set up. Instead, there was no action ever since the current policy came into being in May 2017
- Instead of shifting implementation of the policy and the creation of the fund to the NHM, the Ministry should have followed the policy recommendations and created a national rare disease cell, similar to the blood cell. While the blood cell is a part of the NHM, a national rare disease cell should have been a part of the Ministry, as recommended.
- The Union Health Ministry termed the current policy “untenable” as the implementation of the policy was moved out of the Public Health Division to the National Health Mission (NHM). Since the ambit of the NHM is restricted to primary and secondary health care, rare diseases (which come under tertiary care) cannot be served

Conclusion

- The Constitution of India has provisions guaranteeing the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
- The suspension of the current policy is a travesty of health justice.
- Since the Ministry has neither specified a deadline for a new policy nor made clarifications on the formation of the 10-member policy committee, it is a sign of the government’s shaky commitment towards the plight of rare disease patients.

5. Plain Tobacco Packaging

Introduction

- Attractive colors, eye-catching designs, and engaging characters are critical marketing tools that when placed on tobacco products attract new customers – including nonsmokers and youth
- Appealing packaging designs drive sales, promote tobacco brands, and mislead consumers about the harsh realities and danger of tobacco use.
- In order to overcome this issue Plain packaging is the mantra for health menace

What is Plain Packaging?

It is also known as generic, neutral, standardised or homogeneous packaging. This requires that packaging has a uniform plain color and texture; mandates standard shape, size and materials of packs; and prohibits any branding, logos or other promotional elements on, inside or attached to the packaging or on individual products. Only the brand name, product name, quantity of product and contact details may appear on packaging, in a standard typeface, together with other mandatory information such as health warnings and tax stamps.

- Tobacco packaging and labelling do not promote tobacco products by means that are false, misleading or deceptive
- Packaging carries health warnings describing the harmful effects of tobacco use
- Parties to undertake a comprehensive ban (or restrictions) on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

Examples from the world

- In December 2012, Australia became the first country to introduce plain packaging following the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) guidelines.
- It has also been implemented in France and the United Kingdom (both 2016), Norway and Ireland (both 2017) and New Zealand and Hungary (both 2018).
- Thailand and Saudi Arabia will join a growing club of nations introducing plain packaging of tobacco products in 2019. They are the first in the Asian and Arab regions, respectively, to adopt the tough measure in order to curb tobacco consumption

WTO Ruling

- Understandably, the tobacco industry was opposed to Australia’s plain packaging initiative.
- But the ruling by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), in June 2018, favoring plain packaging, has struck a blow against the tobacco industry.

- The WTO panel, while rejecting the notion that Australia had unjustifiably infringed tobacco trademarks and violated intellectual property rights, said the plain packaging law led to “improving public health by reducing use of and exposure to tobacco products”.

Stats show that pictorial warning has led many people to quit smoking in India

- In April 2016, India increased the size of graphic pictorial warnings, by 85%, on the packaging of tobacco products (both front and back).
- The percentage of users in India who thought of quitting because of such warning labels increased sharply to 62% (cigarette), 54% (bidi) and 46% (smokeless tobacco users), according to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2016-2017, when compared with the survey results of 2009-2010.
- Likewise, tobacco use among those aged 15-24 years showed a six-percentage point reduction (18.4% in 2009-10 to 12.4% in 2016-17). The number of tobacco users dropped by eight million.

Evidence has shown it has helped in reduction world over

- The base includes a large body of peer reviewed studies that have been the subject of three systematic reviews (two in the United Kingdom and one in Ireland). This evidence supports the conclusion that plain packaging:
 - * reduces the attractiveness of tobacco products
 - * restricts use of the pack as a form of advertising and promotion
 - * limits misleading packaging, and
 - * Increases the effectiveness of health warnings.
- Plain packaging along with other measures led to 0.55 percentage point reduction in smoking prevalence in Australia, translating into at least 1,18,000 fewer smokers.

Conclusion

- Therefore with higher taxes and large pictorial warnings, plain packaging can serve as a tool to deter new users and prompt existing users to quit.

6. Tobacco companies targeting children: Study

Context

- Titled Tiny Targets, the study finds that tobacco companies in India are systematically targeting children as young as eight by selling tobacco products and placing tobacco advertisements near schools.

Details

- According to the report, the most common tobacco products available for purchases in the areas covered included cigarettes (29.6 per cent), followed by smokeless tobacco products and ‘bidis’.

- The findings also revealed the fact that most common PoSs were street vendors (56.6 per cent), followed by mobile vendors and small grocery stores.

Concerns

Vendors display tobacco products in ways that are appealing to children and youth. The data is alarming because it documents a very systematic and widespread pattern of activity by tobacco companies to get young people addicted to tobacco.

- These tactics, happening all over the country, is a clear violation of Section 5 and 6 of Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act.
- The researchers also found that the most common tactic was selling single cigarettes (90.9 per cent) to boost sales. This is also an indirect violation of the law because when cigarettes are sold loose, the customers are not exposed to the mandatory health warning which comes with a pack
- The investigators of the survey found that 91 per cent of the tobacco products were at child’s eye level (approximately 1 metre).
- Also, to increase visibility, 90 per cent of the products were displayed beside candy, sweets or toys.
- The industry and retailers were found to be offering incentives as well to append sales.
 - * In as many as 37.5 per cent of PoSs, the investigators found discounts being offered while the rest gave free tobacco products with others.

Way Forward

- Implementation remained a grey area even after so many years of notification, and therefore the police, health and education departments, which are tasked for the implementation of this section of the law, need to be more vigilant.
- Just like alcohol can be sold at shops which are licensed to do so, tobacco products should also be sold under a similar arrangement.

Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act/ COTPA, 2003

- The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003
- It is an Act of Parliament of India enacted in 2003 to prohibit advertisement of, and to provide for the regulation of trade and commerce in, and production, supply and distribution of cigarettes and other tobacco products in India.
- This Act was enacted by the Parliament to give effect to the Resolution passed by the 39th World Health Assembly, urging the member states to implement measures to provide non-smokers protection from involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke.

Features

- The Act prohibits smoking of tobacco in public places, except in special smoking zones in hotels, restaurants and airports and open spaces
- Advertisement of tobacco products including cigarettes is prohibited. No person shall participate in advertisement of tobacco product, or allow a medium of publication to be used for advertisement of tobacco products.
- Tobacco products cannot be sold to person below the age of 18 years, and in places within 100 metres radius from the outer boundary of an institution of education, which includes school colleges and institutions of higher learning established or recognized by an appropriate authority.
- Tobacco products must be sold, supplied or distributed in a package which shall contain an appropriate pictorial warning, its nicotine and tar contents
- The Act also gives power to any police officer, not below the rank of a sub-inspector or any officer of State Food or Drug Administration or any other officer, holding the equivalent rank being not below the rank of Sub-Inspector of Police for search and seizure of premises where tobacco products are produced, stored or sold, if he suspects that the provision of the Act has been violated

7. SUGAM

- It is by the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation (CDSCO)
- It enables online submission of applications, their tracking, processing & grant of approvals online mainly for drugs, clinical trials, ethics committee, medical devices, vaccines and cosmetics.
- Provides a single window for multiple stakeholders (Pharma Industry, Regulators, Citizens) involved in the processes of CDSCO.

8. Swine Flu

- H1N1 flu is also known as swine flu
 - * It's called swine flu because in the past, the people who caught it had direct contact with pigs.
 - * That changed several years ago, when a new virus emerged that spread among people who hadn't been near pigs.
- In 2009, H1N1 was spreading fast around the world, so the World Health Organization called it a pandemic.
 - * It is an epidemic of disease that has spread across a large region; for instance multiple continents, or even worldwide.
 - * This may include communicable and noncommunicable diseases.

- H1N1 has three categories – A, B and C.
 - * A and B categories need home care,
 - * Category C requires immediate hospitalization and medical intervention as its symptoms and outcomes are extremely severe and could result in death.

Treatment

- Antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid, an inhaled powder, or an intravenous solution) that fight against flu viruses in your body.
 - * Oseltamivir (Tamiflu), peramivir (Rapivab), and zanamivir (Relenza) seem to work best, although some kinds of swine flu don't respond to oseltamivir.
- Antibiotics won't help. That's because flu is caused by a virus, not bacteria.

Cause for concern
Doctors have confirmed that the number of suspected swine flu cases in the city are on the rise

Symptoms

- Fever
- Headache
- Runny or stuffy nose, difficulty in breathing
- Bloodstained sputum
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Diarrhoea and vomiting

Other symptoms may include body ache, fatigue

High-risk groups
Children with mild illness but with pre-disposing risk factors; pregnant women; persons aged 65 years or older; patients with lung disease, heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease, blood disorders, diabetes, neurological disorders, cancer and HIV/AIDS, patients on long-term corticosteroid therapy.

DOs

- Avoid crowded places
- Take adequate sleep and rest
- Person suffering from seasonal influenza must be confined at home
- Cover your nose and mouth with disposable tissue or handkerchief while coughing or sneezing
- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water
- Stay more than one arm's length distance from persons having flu
- Drink plenty of water/liquids and eat nutritious food
- Person suspected with influenza like illness must consult doctor

DON'Ts

- Spitting in public places
- Excessive physical exercise
- Smoking in public places
- Unnecessary testing
- Touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands
- Hugging, kissing and shaking hands while greeting
- Taking medicines without consulting doctor
- Disposal of used napkin or tissue paper in open areas
- Touching surfaces usually used by public (railing, door gates, etc.)

9. Yellow Fever Vaccine

Context

- The death of Prof Martin Gore former medical director of the Royal Marsden Hospital in the UK and a renowned cancer specialist, has shocked the medical fraternity because it came after a routine yellow fever vaccination.
- It re-ignited a controversy over vaccines around the world.

What is Yellow Fever?

- Yellow fever is a viral disease of typically short duration
- Yellow fever is a hemorrhagic condition that can lead to a high fever, bleeding into the skin, and cell death in the liver and kidneys.
- If enough liver cells die, liver damage occurs, leading to jaundice, a condition in which the skin takes on a yellowish color

- It is most likely to occur in tropical and subtropical parts of South America, parts of the Caribbean, and Africa.
- It leads to death in a significant proportion of patients, which is why the vaccine is often compulsory before travelling to any of the yellow fever-endemic countries in parts of Africa, and Central and South America.

Symptoms

- Most people with yellow fever do not develop symptoms, or the symptoms are very mild.
- The disease cannot spread among humans. Only infection-carrying mosquitoes spread the disease to humans.
- The main symptoms of yellow fever are a high temperature, a slow pulse, albuminuria, jaundice, congestion of the face, and hemorrhage, or bleeding.

Causes and risk factors

- A flavivirus causes yellow fever.
- The flavivirus is believed to be endemic among monkeys that live in the tree tops of the jungle, known as the jungle canopy, in many parts of Africa and the Americas.
- It is transmitted by mosquito bite, usually the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. The mosquito becomes infected by biting an infected human or a monkey. An infected mosquito is a source of infection for the rest of its life.
- Anybody who travels to an area where the yellow fever virus is present is at risk of becoming infected.
- Travelers should check if the area they are visiting requires a vaccination. A yellow fever vaccine taken 10 to 14 days before traveling provides effective protection from the disease.

How safe is the vaccine?

- Known as 17D, the vaccine is generally considered safe. The World Health Organization (WHO) says: "Yellow fever is prevented by an extremely effective vaccine, which is safe and affordable. A single dose... is sufficient to confer sustained immunity and life-long protection against yellow fever disease."
- There are, however, reports in medical literature about multisystem organ failure following vaccination. In 2001, doctors reported such a case in *The Lancet*.
- There are many other reports available of individual patients who died of complications after yellow fever vaccination, or of even yellow fever after vaccination.

What are the risks?

- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), Atlanta says that while the risk of the vaccine causing serious harm or death is "extremely low", there are complications that may arise.
- Among mild problems associated with the vaccine are fever with aches, soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given.

- These occur in up to 1 person out of 4. They usually begin soon after the shot, and can last up to a week, CDC says. A severe allergic reaction can occur in 1 person in 55,000. A severe nervous system reaction in 1 in 125,000 and a life-threatening illness with organ failure can happen in 1 person in 250,000. More than half in the last group die.

With such risks, why go for vaccination?

- There is evidence available in public health that vaccines provide return for investment — the resources spent on vaccines are more than recovered in the resources saved by the mortality and morbidity that is prevented throughout the lifetime of an individual. Nevertheless, vaccine hesitancy is on the rise.
- Many vaccines introduce a pathogen inside the body. For example, the yellow fever vaccine is a live, weakened yellow fever virus. Because it is live, the body responds to it the same way as in a full-blown infection.
- This ensures that the body knows the vulnerabilities of that virus for the rest of the person's life. Thus, whenever an invasion happens, blood cells that retain the memory of that virus immediately work towards defeating the nascent invasion much before it can go on to become a full-blown infection.

Is there resistance to vaccines in India?

- Vaccine hesitancy is a growing problem the world over. It surfaces periodically.
 - * Delhi High Court underlined the importance of parental consent in vaccines given to children in school.
- Although the diphtheria vaccine is among the oldest in the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), the disease caused the death of 24 children in Delhi in 2018, and 27 in Nuh district (Haryana)

10. Zearalenone

- It is a fungal toxin infesting cereals such as wheat, maize and barley.
- It attacks crops while they are growing, but can also develop when cereals are stored without being dried fully.

Context

- Journal of Food Science study detected zearalenone in wheat, rice, corn and oats from markets in Uttar Pradesh.

Concerns

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) does not impose maximum limits for zearalenone though the European Union (EU) does.
 - * EU regulatory limits of 100-200 mcg/kg of cereals.

- India regulates the levels of some of these, including aflatoxin, deoxynivalenol, ergot and patulin.
 - * The first three infest cereals, while patulin is found in apples.
 - * Each of these toxins has been associated with disease outbreaks.
 - * For example, in 1974, a hepatitis outbreak in Rajasthan and Gujarat, which made 398 people sick and killed 106, was linked to aflatoxin in wheat.
- In zearalenone's case, there is no strong evidence of toxicity in humans so far, though several research groups are investigating. As a result, the IARC classifies it as a Group 3 carcinogen, which means evidence is not sufficient for an evaluation yet.

Why we should regulate Zearalenone?

- Zearalenone behaves like oestrogen, the female sex hormone, and could cause endocrine disturbances in humans.
- Its nasty effects in animals, such as pigs, are documented. When fed with mouldy corn, pigs develop inflamed vaginas, infertility and other symptoms.
- This is why countries like Brazil regulate zearalenone levels in animal feed.
- In humans, the data are fuzzier. It is probably dangerous to humans too, but to be certain, we need to know how much humans consume, how it is metabolised, and how exposure is correlated with disease

Zearalenone favour cool climates, such contamination could be limited to a few States. Therefore more data are needed from cereals in other States, and from other storage conditions, before India decides to set limits.

11. Midday meal controversy in Karnataka

Context

- The Karnataka government's midday meal programme in schools has run into controversy with one of its NGO partners in the mammoth welfare exercise, International Society for Krishna Consciousness's subsidiary Akshaya Patra Foundation (APF), refusing to include onion and garlic in cooking

Nutritious values of Onions and Garlic

- Oxalate are generally found in leafy greens, vegetables, nuts and seeds
- Phytates are found in whole grains, legumes
 - * Oxalate are called an antinutrient as they reduce Mineral Absorption. They precipitate iron and zinc and prevent their absorption from the gut.
- Onion and garlic appear to enhance the absorption of these minerals by enhancing the bioaccessibility of iron and zinc from grain.

- This is significant because 50-70% of children in India are anaemic, mainly because of iron deficiency.
- So including onion and garlic in food has several health benefits, including reducing cholesterol in adults.
- Besides this, the aroma and taste of the food enhances the quality of the food

Concern

- State Food Commission said it had received complaints about students skipping the midday meals as they did not like the taste of the food without onion and garlic, which are an integral part of the food culture among most communities.
- Children skipping meals is worrying because malnutrition is a serious issue.

12. Mobile Apps Launched Ministry Of Health And Family Welfare

- Indradhanush (for immunisation tracker)
- India Fights Dengue (enables a user to check Dengue Symptoms, get nearest Hospital / Blood bank information and also share feedback)
- NHP Swasth Bharat (information dissemination on Disease, Lifestyle, First Aid)
- NHP Directory Services Mobile App. (provides information related to Hospital and Blood banks across India have been hosted.
- No More Tension Mobile App. (information on stress management related aspects)
- Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) Mobile App. (for providing pregnancy care by volunteer doctors across states)

13. The lowdown on blood transfusions

Background

- Recently, a young pregnant woman in a government hospital at a rural centre in south Tamil Nadu's Madurai district, expecting her second child, heard from doctors, after she was admitted following a spell of sickness, that she had tested positive for HIV.
- Later on, as the story unravelled, in the full media glare, it turned out that she had acquired the virus after a blood transfusion in a district hospital following a diagnosis of anaemia.

Analysis:

- This unfortunate development opened up a Pandora's Box, and fear and distrust pervaded the community.
- Further, besides flagging the issue of the availability of safe blood in the State, it set in motion a sequence of events, mostly tragic, introspection, and some corrective action.

- The blood donor, who had donated as a replacement donor when a pregnant relative required a transfusion, only discovered his HIV positive status after a test for a job interview. He rushed back to the hospital, laden with guilt, to inform authorities. By then, his blood had been transfused to the pregnant woman, and she had tested positive.
- It is important to note that his blood donation history retrospectively exposed chinks in the blood donation and transfusion cycle in at least two instances. He had already donated blood in 2016, but his blood was discarded after he tested positive for HIV.
- However, though the HIV law mandates that the patient be informed with counseling about his/her status, in this case, the donor remained in the dark.
- In the second instance, when he donated his blood in November 2018, two years after the first, the lab failed to test and/or detect his infection, which was clearly not in the 'window period' where the virus may avoid detection. The donor was distraught, and attempted suicide, and died in hospital later.
- A few days later, another pregnant woman claimed she had been transfused with HIV-infected blood at Kilpauk Medical College and Hospital in Chennai. While her claim has been contested stoutly, the two incidents have, nevertheless, rocked the State that once won plaudits for its prevention of transmission programmes.

Process to be followed

- There is a chain of approved processes to be followed in blood donation, aimed at quality control and negating the possibility of transmitting infections.
- Every qualified donor is put through a basic clinical evaluation (blood pressure and pulse).
- If normal, a sample of the blood donated is tested for HIV, Hepatitis B and C, sexually transmitted diseases and malaria.
- Meanwhile, the donated blood is stored separately in an 'unscreened refrigerator'.
 - * If the sample clears these tests, or if the tests turn negative, the blood will then be moved to the 'screened refrigerator'.
- If it tests positive for any of the infections, another sample from the same blood bag is tested again. If positive, the bag is discarded.
- The HIV Act mandates that the blood bank inform the positive donor, besides referring to the appropriate department for further treatment. When a requirement crops up, the blood bank does a grouping to confirm that the group is the same, does a cross-match with the recipient and releases it to the ward.

Concluding Remarks

- Currently, the Madras High Court has sought a report from the Health Department.
- The National and State Human Rights Commissions have taken suo motu cognisance of the issue and asked for the State's response.

- The need, however, is to build confidence in the community that the most exacting standards are followed in collecting, testing and storing blood, and then in transfusing it.
- Even if this calls for a re-look at the entire process, it must be done. It is as crucial as making sure no one dies because they could not get blood in time.

14. HC stays ban on online sale of drugs

Context

- A Division Bench of the Madras High Court stayed the operation of a single judge's order banning online sale of medicines. Though the Centre was yet to notify statutory rules for regulating such sales, imposing a sudden ban would cause grave hardship and health issues to patients relying on e-pharmacies, the Bench said.
- Passing interim orders on a batch of writ appeals preferred by e-pharma firms, Justices M. Sathyanarayanan and P. Rajamanickam said the number of people who prefer to purchase medicines online was on the rise because not all patients and their caregivers would be in a position to go in search of the required drugs.

Background

- The Madras High Court in 2018 directed the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and competent authorities under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940 to immediately stop online sale of medicines that could be sold only in pharmacies on the prescription of a registered medical practitioner.
- More than a month after granting an interim stay on the online sale of drugs and medicines, the Madras high court in December 2018 refused to vacate the stay, thereby banning the sales through e-pharmacies.
- The next step for the online drug industry, in the light of the Madras High Court judgment banning the sale of medicines online, would clearly be legal – an appeal against the verdict.

Analysis of the issue

- The attraction of the online pharmacy, for many, is the fancy discounts that are available, up to 60%, besides free home delivery and sometimes, other value-added services.
- It is the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, that regulates the import, manufacture and distribution of medicines in the country. While it regulates sales of drugs, it was not clear, as the online pharmacy trade emerged, whether the existing rules under the Act would be applicable to the portals selling medicines.
- It was in order to address this specific issue, that the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare published draft rules in September 2018, seeking to amend the Drugs and Cosmetics rules regarding the distribution or sale, stock, exhibit or offer for sale of drugs through e-pharmacies.

- While currently no provisions exist for the registration of any of these online pharmacies, the new rules mandate all e-pharmacy holders be registered with the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI), and the State drug regulator. Periodic inspection of the premises too will be on the cards.
- Online portals cannot sell narcotic drugs, tranquillisers and Schedule X drugs, and cannot advertise their services, as under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. Under the new rules, complete information on the medicines will have to be provided by the e-pharmacy holders, and a 24/7 helpline should be made available.
- The top-level Drugs Technical Advisory Board also recently approved the draft rules to allow the operation of e-pharmacies.

15. Non-communicable diseases top killers: WHO

Context

- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) — mainly cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer — continue to be the top killers in the South-East Asia Region, claiming 8.5 million lives each year, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Highlights of report

- Containing the NCDs has been listed by the WHO as its health goal for this year along with reducing mortality related to air pollution and climate change, global influenza pandemic etc.
- “One third of these deaths are premature and occur before the age of 70, affecting economically productive individuals. The four ‘major’ NCDs are caused, to a large extent, by four modifiable behavioural risk factors: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity and harmful use of alcohol. The NCDs disproportionately affect the poor, impoverish families, and place a growing burden on health care systems,” noted the WHO.
- Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease, are collectively responsible for over 70% of all deaths worldwide, or 41 million people. These include 15 million people dying prematurely, aged between 30 and 69.

Solutions

- K.K. Aggarwal, former president of the Indian Medical Association, said: “A study conducted world-wide has noted that consuming fibre and whole grains can reduce health risks from non-communicable diseases such as heart disease.
- The paper published in The Lancet indicates that eating fibre-rich foods reduces the incidence of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and colorectal cancer by 16% to 24%. A higher fibre intake is also associated with lower bodyweight, systolic blood pressure and total cholesterol when compared with lower intake.

- Doctors then recommend — eat less and enjoy your food by eating slowly, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, avoid oversized portions which causes weight gain, at least half of your grains should be whole grains, limit consumption of food high in trans fats.

16. Think differently about healthcare

Editorial Analysis:

- In India, public health and health services have been synonymous. This integration has dwarfed the growth of a comprehensive public health system, which is critical to overcome some of the systemic challenges in healthcare.
- Experts have opined that a stark increase in population growth, along with rising life expectancy, provides the burden of chronic diseases.
- Tackling this requires an interdisciplinary approach. An individual-centric approach within healthcare centres does little to promote well-being in the community.
- Seat belt laws, regulations around food and drug safety, and policies for tobacco and substance use as well as climate change and clean energy are all intrinsic to health, but they are not necessarily the responsibilities of healthcare services.
- Some experts have opined that as most nations realise the vitality of a robust public health system, India lacks a comprehensive model that isn't subservient to healthcare services.

A different curriculum

- Some critics have opined that India's public health workforce come from an estimated 51 colleges that offer a graduate programme in public health. This number is lower at the undergraduate level. In stark contrast, 238 universities offer a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree in the U.S.
- In addition to the quantitative problem, India also has a diversity problem. It is important to note that a diverse student population is necessary to create an interdisciplinary workforce.
- The 2017 Gorakhpur tragedy in Uttar Pradesh, the 2018 Majerhat bridge collapse in Kolkata, air pollution in Delhi and the Punjab narcotics crisis are all public health tragedies.
- In all these cases, the quality of healthcare services is critical to prevent morbidity and mortality. However, a well organised public health system with supporting infrastructure strives to prevent catastrophic events like this.
- Public health tracks range from research, global health, health communication, urban planning, health policy, environmental science, behavioural sciences, healthcare management, financing, and behavioural economics.

- In the U.S., it is routine for public health graduates to come from engineering, social work, medicine, finance, law, architecture, and anthropology. This diversity is further enhanced by a curriculum that enables graduates to become key stakeholders in the health system. Hence, strong academic programmes are critical to harness the potential that students from various disciplines will prospectively bring to MPH training.
- Investments in health and social services tend to take precedence over public health expenditure. While benefits from population-level investments are usually long term but sustained, they tend to accrue much later than the tenure of most politicians. This is often cited to be a reason for reluctance in investing in public health as opposed to other health and social services.
- This is not only specific to India; most national health systems struggle with this conundrum. A recent systematic review on Return on Investment (ROI) in public health looked at health promotion, legislation, social determinants, and health protection.
- They opine that a \$1 investment in the taxation of sugary beverages can yield returns of \$55 in the long term. Another study showed a \$9 ROI for every dollar spent on early childhood health, while tobacco prevention programmes yield a 1,900% ROI for every dollar spent.
- The impact of saving valuable revenue through prevention is indispensable for growing economies like India.

Problem of health literacy

- Legislation is often shaped by public perception. While it is ideal for legislation to be informed by research, it is rarely the case. It is health literacy through health communication that shapes this perception. Health communication, an integral arm of public health, aims to disseminate critical information to improve the health literacy of the population.
- The World Health Organisation calls for efforts to improve health literacy, which is an independent determinant of better health outcome.
- It is important to note that data from the U.S. show that close to half of Americans lack the necessary knowledge to act on health information and one-third of Europeans have problems with health literacy.
- Further, India certainly has a serious problem with health literacy and it is the responsibility of public health professionals to close this gap.
- Equally important is a system of evaluating national programmes. While some fail due to the internal validity of the intervention itself, many fail from improper implementation. Programme planning, implementation and evaluation matrices will distinguish formative and outcome evaluation, so valuable time and money can be saved.

- The public health system looks at the social ecology and determinants focusing on optimising wellness.
- Healthcare services, on the other hand, primarily focus on preventing morbidity and mortality. Experts believe that a comprehensive healthcare system will seamlessly bridge the two.

A council for public health:

- A central body along the lines of a council for public health may be envisaged to synergistically work with agencies such as the public works department, the narcotics bureau, water management, food safety, sanitation, urban and rural planning, housing and infrastructure to promote population-level health.
- In many ways, these agencies serve to bring in many facets of existing State and federal agencies and force them to see through the lens of public health.

Concluding Remarks:

- The proposed council for public health should also work closely with academic institutions to develop curriculum and provide license and accreditation to schools to promote interdisciplinary curriculum in public health.
- As international health systems are combating rising healthcare costs, there is an impending need to systematically make healthcare inclusive to all.
- While the proposed, comprehensive insurance programme Ayushman Bharat caters to a subset of the population, systemic reforms in public health will shift the entire population to better health.
- Regulatory challenges force governments to deploy cost-effective solutions while ethical challenges to create equitable services concerns all of India.
- With the infusion of technology driving costs on the secondary and tertiary end, it is going to be paramount for India to reinvigorate its public health system to maximise prevention. India's public health system can no longer function within the shadow of its health services.

EDUCATION

1. 70-point grading index

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has introduced a 70-point grading index to assess the quality of school education offered by states.
- The states will be marked out of 1,000 scores on 70 parameters
- This will give the correct picture of where every state stands. There will be a fair competition to improve each other's performances
- The school curriculum will also be reviewed to ensure holistic education in which there will be time for physical education, value education, life skill education and experiential learning

2. App for Odia-medium school students

Context

- The Ganjam district administration is developing a free mobile app to help students of Odia medium schools enhance their knowledge via tutorials in their first language.

Details

- Recording of videos of best teachers of the district explain important chapters in Odia has already started.
- These videos will be uploaded to 'YouTube' and their links will be provided on the app.
- Besides the videos, the app will also provide detailed study materials and interactive practice tests.

Significance

- This will help the Odia medium school students on par with those studying in English medium private schools
- The school education app is also expected to help teachers share their best teaching practices.
- Using it, parents will also be able to understand and keep track of what is being taught to their children in schools

3. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018

Context

- According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018, the results of a yearly survey that NGO Pratham has been carrying out since 2006, shows that
 - * more than half of Class VIII students cannot correctly solve a numerical division problem and
 - * More than a quarter of them cannot read a primary-level text.

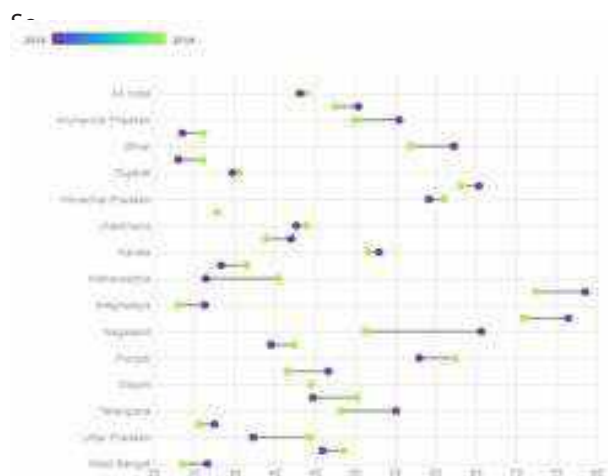
Stats

- Those figures are worse than they were a decade ago.
 - * In 2008, 84.8% of Class VIII students could read a text meant for Class II;
 - * By 2014, only 74.6% could do so, and
 - * By 2018, that percentage had fallen further to 72.8%.
- Four years ago, 44.1% of students at Class VIII could correctly divide a three-digit number by a single-digit number; in 2018, that figure had fallen slightly to 43.9%.
- The picture is slightly more encouraging at the Class III level, where there has been gradual improvement since 2014. However, even in 2018, less than 30% of students in Class III are actually at their grade level, that is, able to read a Class II text and do double-digit subtraction.
- Pratham researchers concluded that "without strong foundational skills, it is difficult for children to cope with what is expected of them in the upper primary grades".

Some Improvements

The ASER survey covered almost 5.5 lakh children between the ages of 3 and 16 in 596 rural districts across the country.

- In an encouraging trend, it found that enrolment is increasing and the percentage of children under 14 who are out of school is less than 4%.
- The gender gap is also shrinking, even within the older cohort of 15- and 16-year-olds.
- Only 13.6% of girls of that age are out of school — the first time the figure has dropped below the 15% mark.



Way forward

- As implementation of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan rolls out across the country, ASER data on young children suggests that a “one size fits all” solution is unlikely to be successful.
- While helping children get a head start in the early years is important, it is critical to ensure that all stakeholders — parents, teachers, policymakers and textbook developers — understand that the key words are “quality” and “developmentally appropriate”.
- The continuum envisaged for the early years curriculum should start from and build on what children bring with them when they enter preschool and school, so that they are able to grow and thrive

4. Jan Shikshan Sansthan**Context**

- They are established to provide vocational training to non-literate, neo-literate, as well as school drop outs by identifying skills as would have a market in the region of their establishment.
- The government unveiled new guidelines for Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) aligning them to the National Skills Qualification Framework with an aim to providing standardised training across sectors.

The Scope of Work of Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSSs) will include the following:

- Develop/ Source appropriate curriculum and training modules covering vocational elements general awareness and life enrichment components.
- Wherever possible, JSS are encouraged to undertake
- Training equivalent to courses designed by the Directorate of Adult education, National Institute of Open Schooling and Director General Employment & Training.
- Provide training to a pool of resource persons and master trainers for conducting training as also availability of infrastructure and training – specific equipment.
- Administer simple tests and award certificates
- Network with employers and industries for trainees to get suitable placements.

5. Government announces hike in research fellowship**Context**

- Central Government has enhanced the fellowship of Ph.D students and other research personnel enrolled in any area of science and technology, including Physical and Chemical Sciences, Engineering, Mathematical Sciences, Agricultural Sciences, Life Sciences, Pharmacy etc.

Details

- Fellowship of the Junior Research Fellows in the first two years of Ph.D programme is increased from the current rate of 25,000/- to Rs.31,000/- per month.

- Similarly, in the remaining tenure of Ph.D, Senior Research Fellow will get Rs. 35,000/- per month instead of the present Rs.28,000/- per month.
- Further, there is substantial 30-35% enhancement in the financial rewards for the scientists involved in the R&D projects as Research Associates. The top bracket of Research Associateship is fixed at Rs.54,000/-.
- All the research fellows are also entitled to HRA as per Central Government norms.

Significance

- The hike in fellowship will directly benefit over 60,000 Research Fellows and also provide a template to the States to consider increase in their fellowship rates.
- Ph.D scholars, working in science and technology, are the most significant contributors to the knowledge base of the country for its industrial competitiveness, academic vibrancy and technology led innovations.

Background

- The decision comes after a series of protests by researchers from leading institutes like the Indian Institutes of Technology, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) laboratories, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research and All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), who had been demanding a hike of at least 80%.

Concerns

- It is the lowest hike since 2006 (in percentage terms).

ART AND CULTURE

1. Asurgarh Fort

- It is situated In the Kalahandi District in the state Orissa
- The name Asurgarh derived from the two words combination that is 'asur' which means demon and 'garh' which means house.

Context

- Archaeologists have unearthed artefacts believed to be 2,300-year-old while carrying out excavation at the Asurgarh Fort in Odisha's Kalahandi district.

Details

- The present archaeological work reveals a number of brick structures.
- Most of the structures have terracotta tiles with grooves and hole for socketing
 - * The Asurgarh people during that time probably used stone rubbles and tile fragments for flooring their houses and the streets
- Besides, silver punch marked coins, silver and copper toe ring and ear rings, beads of carnelian, jasper, beryl, garnet, agate and coral have been found
- Other discovered artefacts include, glass bangle pieces of different designs and colours, sling balls, pestle, iron equipment like small wheel, ring, and arrow head.
- The findings of coral beads and imperial variety of silver punch mark coins strongly indicates about long distant trade and association of hinterland people with seafaring people

Ditch as defence

- It is believed that the fort is surrounded by moat on its northern, eastern and southern sides.
- On the western side of the Fort River Sandul flows to the north thereby forming a natural moat.
- On the eastern side of the fort there is an extensive lake.
- The fort had four wide gates in four cardinal directions and at each gate was installed one guardian deity.
 - * Ganga at the eastern gate,
 - * Kalapat at the western,
 - * Vaishnavi at the northern
 - * Dokri at the southern gate

2. Chowmahalla Palace

- It is a palace of the Nizams of Hyderabad state, in India
- The construction of Chowmahalla Palace started in the year 1750 by Nizam Salabat Jung and was completed between 1857 and 1869 during the reign of Asaf Jah V.

- It was the seat of the Asaf Jahi dynasty and was the official residence of the Nizams of Hyderabad while they ruled their state
- The place is named chowmahalla, which means four palaces. The word char, and its variation chau, means four and the word mahal means palace
 - * It is a synthesis of Rajasthani, European, Persian and Indo-Sarcenic architectural styles. It is divided into northern and southern courtyards, beautified by beautiful gardens and fountains.
- The UNESCO Asia Pacific Merit award for cultural heritage conservation was presented to Chowmahalla Palace in 2010.

3. Indian Panorama Film Festival

- It is ten-day Festival is being organized by the Directorate of Film Festivals, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting
 - * The Directorate facilitates the participation of India in festivals abroad, and arranges for foreign film programmes to be held in the country.
- It was organised at Siri Fort Auditorium II, New Delhi.

4. Katora Houz

- It is the 450-yearold cup-shaped water tank, constructed in Golconda fort
- It was Swimming Pool of Quli Qutub Shahi Kings.
- The site is currently protected by the Archeological Survey of India

Concerns

- Garbage from the nearby residential areas are being dumped into it turning it into a dump yard
- There is heaps of plastic bags, garbage swirling freely with the sewage water, broken fencing and mosquitoes.

5. Lakhon Khol

Context

- Lakhon Khol, nearly wiped out by the Khmer Rouge regime, was recently listed by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage, along with neighbouring Thailand's version known as Khon.

Details

- It is old tradition of masked dance practiced in Cambodia
- Dancers wearing elaborate painted masks illustrate mainly the localised versions of the Indian epic Ramayana, which is known in Cambodia as the Reamker and in Thailand as the Ramakien.

- This will involve over a hundred actors, a percussion-dominated orchestra, narrators, singers, and a chorus.

6. Lothal- India's oldest port cities

Larger Background

- The Harappan Civilisation was widespread: it covered parts of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Even though, post-Partition, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro fell in Pakistani territory, there are many sites of the Harappan Civilisation in India too.
- Indian archaeologists started the search for cities of the Harappan Civilisation post-1947 in Saurashtra, Gujarat, and were amply rewarded. Archaeologist S.R. Rao led teams who discovered a number of Harappan sites, including the port city of Lothal in 1954-63.
- Two sub-periods of Harappan culture are marked out: period A dating to 2,400-1,900 BCE, and period B dating to 1,900-1,600 BCE.
- The word Lothal, like Mohenjo-daro, means the mound of the dead.
- Lothal is located between the Bhogavo and Sabarmati rivers near the Gulf of Khambat.=

A Note on the archaeological site of Lothal:

- It is 218 m long and 37 m wide and is bound on all sides by baked bricks. It had gaps for a sluice gate and inlet.
- As we haven't yet deciphered the Indus script, we don't know if this was really India's first port as is claimed by some and questioned by some historians. But it is true that the discovery of Lothal seals in other ancient cities points to its importance in trade that was conducted with other ancient civilisations. The dockyard proves the maritime activity of the Harappans.
- Lothal was in the thick of Harappan maritime trade, and beads made from semi-precious stones, terracotta, gold, etc. were popular in areas as far as Sumer (modern-day Iraq), Bahrain and Iran.
- The Lothal bead-makers were highly skilled. According to the signboard in the Archaeological Survey of India museum there, which displays these beads, a bead-maker's house was excavated in the lower town. It had several rooms and a kiln.
- Eight hundred cornelian beads in various stages of production and tools and raw materials were also recovered from there.
- Further, a vase discovered at Lothal has the painting of a crow standing next to a pitcher with a deer looking back at it. It reminds one of the tale of the thirsty crow in the Panchatantra.
- Lastly, it is important to note that the 4,500-year-old city was mathematically planned. It had a grid pattern with proper streets crossing at right angles, drainage systems, and a great bath. The emphasis on cleanliness can be judged from the discovery of toilets and lota-like jars.

7. Maghi

- Maghi is the annual festival and one of the seasonal gathering of the Sikhs
- A fair (mela) is held at Muktsar Sahib every year and called the Mela Maghi
- It is celebrated in the memory of forty Sikh martyrs (Chalis Mukte), who once had deserted the tenth and last human Guru of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Sahib

Battle of Muktsar

- Muktsar, literally meaning The Pool of Liberation
- The forty martyrs later rejoined the Guru and died while fighting the Mughal Empire army led by Wazir Khan in 1705

Context

- Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh appealed to all political parties not to hold any public function during the annual 'Maghi' fair at Sri Muktsar Sahib, in view of the sanctity of the occasion.

8. Monuments of National Importance

Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 defines an "Ancient Monument" as follows

- Ancient Monument means any structure, erection or monument, or any tumulus or place of interment, or any cave, rock-sculpture, inscription or monolith which is of historical, archaeological or artistic interest and which has been in existence for not less than 100 years

A "Monument of National Importance" is designated by the Archaeological Survey of India and includes the following:

- The remains of an ancient monument
- The site of an ancient monument
- The land on which there are fences or protective covering structures for preserving the monument
- Land by means of which people can freely access the monument

Context

- ASI declared 6 monuments of national importance in 2018

Details

- The 125-year-old Old High Court Building in Nagpur, Maharashtra, and
- two Mughal-era monuments in Agra — Haveli of Agha Khan and Hathi Khana
- The ancient Neemrana Baori in Rajasthan's Alwar district;
- the Group of Temples at Ranipur Jharail in Odisha's Bolangir district;

- the Vishnu Temple in Kotali, Pithoragarh district, Uttarakhand

There were 3,686 centrally protected monuments/sites under the ASI in the country; the number has now increased to 3,693.

- Uttar Pradesh (745 monuments/sites), Karnataka (506) and Tamil Nadu (413) have the highest number of ASI-maintained sites.

9. National Museum of Indian Cinema

- The National Museum of Indian Cinema has been set up to showcase the rich cinematic history of India as well as to encapsulate socio-cultural history of India as revealed through evolution of Cinema.
- It will take the visitors through an absorbing journey of more than a century of Indian Cinema in a story telling mode with the help of visuals and graphics, film clippings, artifacts, publicity materials, interactive exhibits and many more.
- Located at Films Division Complex in South Mumbai, it is spread over two buildings, in the historic Gulshan Mahal and New Museum Building.
- The New Museum Building consists of four levels: Level 1 – Gandhi & Cinema, Level 2 – Children's Film Studio, Level 3 – Technology, Creativity and Indian Cinema and Level 4 – Cinema across India.

10. Nati (dance)

- It is traditional dance of Kullu in Himachal Pradesh
- The dance is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as largest folk dance.
- This dance is also popular in jounsari community in uttrakhand.

11. Petroglyph

Context

- Andhra Pradesh's second largest petroglyph site, containing about 80 petroglyphs, has been discovered at Mekala Benchi, near Aspari, in Kurnool district. These petroglyphs, or rock carvings, underscore Kurnool's importance as a major site of Neolithic settlements in south India.
- Kandhanathi, with 200 petroglyphs, is also in Kurnool district. While Mekala Benchi has rock carvings dating back from the Neolithic to the Megalithic period, Kandhanathi's carvings range from the prehistoric to the historic period.

Petroglyph

- A petroglyph is usually a prehistoric carving in a rock. Prehistory refers to the period of time before civilization and writing. There are only archeological sources available for prehistoric period which includes stone and bone tools, rock arts etc.
- The term rock art includes pictographs (paintings on rocks) and petroglyphs which are carved into the flat, open rock surface gives them a scale and look that is unique.

- Petroglyphs are images created by removing part of rock surface by incising, picking, carving, or abrading as a form of rock art.
- They are typically made on granite, sand stone and laterite rocks. The early man typically chose rock facets coated with patina which is a dark mineral accumulation on rock surfaces. In making the picture the outer patina is removed exposing the contrasting lighter rock interior. They are made by using stone chisel and hammer stone.
- Some of them depict real life events like hunting and flora and fauna of the time. There were some abstract petroglyphs which represent religious or ceremonial purposes.
- They might be used for symbolic communication as a form of pre writing. Some of them represent geometrical patterns. Some depict the tools used by early man.
- Some represented abstract and fertility symbols. Some of them also represent aquatic life.

Phuti Masjid

- Fauti Masjid (also Phuti Masjid) is a mosque in the city of Kumarpur, India which was built by Nawab Sarfaraz Khan in 1740 AD.
- The old Fauti Masjid is one of the largest mosques in the town of Kumarpur and Murshidabad. It is about 3 quarters of a mile away from the grand and famous Hazarduari Palace.
- The mosque is quite large: 135 ft. long and 38 ft. wide with four cupolas at the corners. Only two of its five planned domes were completed. Dangerous looking spiral staircases lead up to the cupolas.
- As the builder died soon after construction began, the mosque was never completed. And so the name Phuti Masjid, or broken mosque. It is also known rather morbidly as Fouti Masjid. 'Fout' means death, and the name was apparently given after the builder's death.
- One legend goes that this mosque was built in one night by Sarfaraz Khan.

Background

- Murshidabad in West Bengal, was among the richest courts of the 18th and 19th century.
- It was Nawab Murshid Quli Khan who had appointed Sarfaraz Khan as his successor before his death in 1727 as there was no direct heir to the throne.
- However, his son-in-law (Sarfaraz's father) Shuja Khan frustrated Sarfaraz's dreams.
- He felt that he had a bigger claim to the musnad, or the throne, of Murshidabad. Sarfaraz could only ascend the throne in 1739 with the title Alauddin Haider Jung.

12. Qasr al-Farid tomb (The Lonely Castle)

- It is located in the archaeological site of Madâin Sâlih in the north of Saudi Arabia.
- The Qasr al-Farid is one of the 111 monumental tombs scattered around the landscape of the Madâin Sâlih, a site which was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage site in 2008.
- It was named so due to the fact that it is completely isolated from the other tombs situated in the area. This is unusual, given that most of the monumental tombs in Madâin Sâlih were found to have been made in groups.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. **Cyclone Pabuk**

- Pabuk originated over the Gulf of Thailand and its neighbourhood
- Pabuk is a name given by Laos and means a 'big fresh water fish'.

2. **Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar**

Context

- Government has instituted an annual award titled Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar. The award is to be announced every year on 23rd January on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

Details

- In the aftermath of any disaster, many organisations and individuals work silently but effectively to alleviate suffering of the affected population.
- Their immense contribution and selfless service to humanity often goes unacknowledged. Keeping this in view, Prime Minister, has advised to institute a National Award so as to recognise the efforts of such organisations and individuals.
- All Indian Citizens and organizations, who have excelled in areas of Disaster Management; like Prevention, Mitigation, Preparedness, Rescue, Response, Relief, Rehabilitation, Research/ Innovations or Early Warning are eligible for the Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar.

GOVERNANCE

1. Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill 2018

Context

- In a move aimed at providing legal backing to SC judgment the Cabinet has introduced Aadhaar and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill 2018
- The bill will amend the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002.
- The Bill was in compliance with the Supreme Court's judgment which said Aadhaar can only be used for welfare schemes and for delivering state subsidies and that there would be no infringement of privacy.

Details

- The bill will provide for voluntary sharing of Aadhaar details for obtaining new mobile phone connections and opening bank accounts.
- The legislation proposes telecom service providers, apart from using Aadhaar for authentication, can also leverage offline verification, use of passport, or any other officially valid document or modes of identification as notified by the central Government.
- It says that every requesting entity to whom an authentication request is made, will inform the Aadhaar number holder of alternate and viable means of identification and shall not deny any service to them for refusing to, or being unable to undergo authentication.
- Mandatory authentication of an Aadhaar holder for the provision of any service will take place if such authentication is required by a law made by Parliament.
- It would permit children, who would turn 18 years old, to opt out of the system

Penalty

- The bill proposes a civil penalty of up to Rs. 1 crore on entities that violate the provisions of the Aadhaar Act, with an additional fine of up to Rs. 10 lakh per day in case of continuous non-compliance.
- Unauthorised use of identity information by a requesting entity or offline verification seeking entity would be punishable with imprisonment of up to three years with a fine that may extend to Rs. 10,000 or in case of a company with a fine of up to Rs. 1 lakh.
- Punishment for unauthorised access to the Central Identities Data Repository as well as data tampering is proposed to be extended to 10 years each from the current three years.

- There will be a provision to file an appeal before the TDSAT (Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal), and against the orders of TDSAT an appeal can be made in the Supreme Court.

Criticism

- It should have been introduced after consulting the stakeholders which the Govt has not paid any heed to.
- Introduction of bill without enactment of data protection law is questionable as it violates the fundamental right of right to Privacy

Aadhaar and driving licence may be linked

Context:

- The central government announced that linking of driving licence with Aadhaar card will soon be made mandatory. The proposal was announced after the Aadhaar amendment bill was passed in the Lok Sabha.

Benefits:

- It will help in better identification of licence holders: For instance A person guilty of committing an accident often flees the scene and get another duplicate licence. However, linking Aadhaar with driving licence will allow easy identification in such cases.
- The move will help avoid duplication of driving licences: One of the key reason behind the government's intention to link driving licence with Aadhaar card is to crack down on illegal duplication of licences. At present, it is easy to get duplicate licences by approaching different Regional Transport Offices (RTO). This is a reason of concern for the government as many people misuse the document.
- Payment of fines: Having Aadhaar linked to driving licence will also ensure that people pay fines that have been issued. As of now, many people either void paying the penalties for long durations or just get a new licence made if the fine amount is too high. Linking of Aadhaar with driving licence will also help in solving such instances.

2. Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)

- Transparency International (TI) has published the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) since 1995, annually ranking countries "by their perceived levels of corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys

- The CPI generally defines corruption as “the misuse of public power for private benefit”
- The assessments are either business people opinion surveys or performance assessments from a group of analysts
 - * In 2017, Transparency International used 13 sources as the basis for its country scores.
 - * Sources included the African Development Bank, the World Bank, a survey of executives at the World Economic Forum, country risk ratings from the Economist Intelligence Unit and country risk ratings from Global Insight, among others.
- The score runs from zero, which is highly corrupt, to 100, which is very clean.

Legend:

Scores	Perceived as less corrupt					Perceived as more corrupt				
	100-090	089-080	079-070	069-060	059-050	049-040	039-030	029-020	019-010	009-000

Cultural factors

“Just as it is impossible not to taste the honey (or the poison) that finds itself at the tip of the tongue, so it is impossible for a government servant not to eat up, at least, a bit of the king’s revenue.

Just as fish moving under water cannot possibly be found out either as drinking or not drinking water. So government servants employed in the government work cannot be found out (while) taking money (for themselves).

- The cultural perspective is attributed to national character.
 - * For instance the least corrupt nations, with the exception of Singapore, are European or European-settler states.
 - * Even Singapore has a highly ‘Europeanised’ structure, in all regards except that of some citizen rights.

Historical

- For instance, by referring to the top-down power structures of feudal or colonial regimes in places like Morocco, China and India until just a few decades ago.
 - * I. With British rule came early examples of corruptive bureaucratic practices. For instance, Warren Hastings caused so much embarrassment to the British Government that
 - * II. Edmund Burke famously stated at Hastings’s impeachment trial. “I impeach him in the name of the people of India, whose laws, rights, and liberties he has subverted whose property he has destroyed, whose country he has laid waste and desolate. I impeach him in the name, and by virtue, of those eternal laws of justice which he has violated”
- For instance, by referring to the top-down power structures of feudal or colonial regimes in places like Morocco, China and India until just a few decades ago.

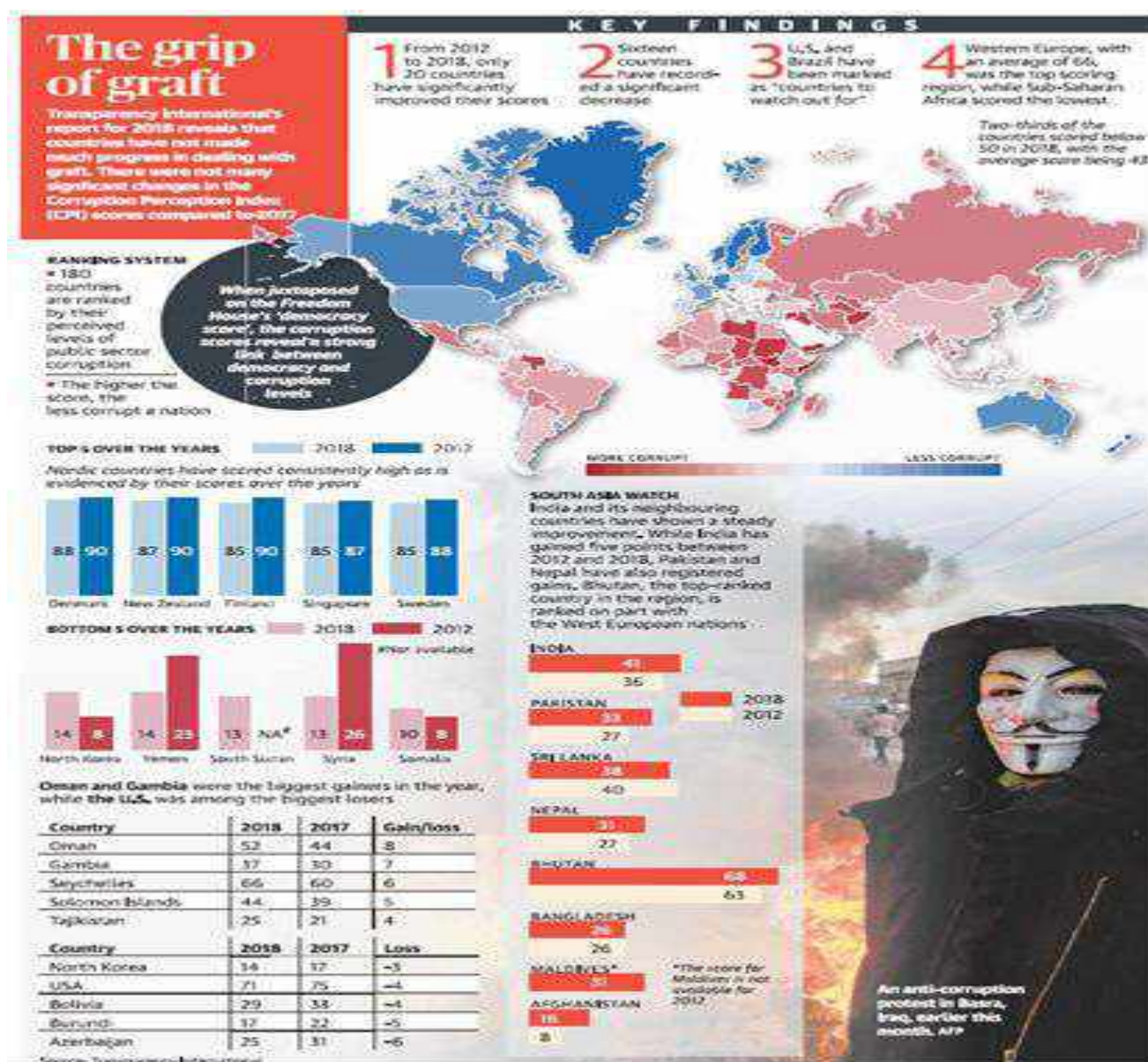
- * I. After Indianization of civil services, after independence, civil servants came under political control
- * II. Under India’s five-year plans and socialistic pattern of society numerous regulations were promulgated.
- * III. The licenses and permits were more important than market forces. The bureaucrats began to accept and demand bribes.
- * IV. The bribes were paid by different businessmen as:

Law and lawlessness have a domino effect:

- If one follows the law, other people around that individual are more likely to do so;
- If one breaks the law, other people around that person are also more likely to do so.
- Only fear upholds the law, and the moment the citizen can get away with it, he or she breaks the law. This can also lead to a greater tendency towards corruption.
- The cases relating to corruption are often handled in a casual and clumsy manner.

Socio-economic disparities

- This is related to the rich getting rich and the poor getting poor. The Govt needs to work on Policy and Program to bridge this divide that exists.



3. DTH regulations

Context

- TRAI's has come up with new regulatory tariff for DTH(Direct To Home) which aims to make TV subscriptions more affordable and will come into effect on February 1, 2019.
- The regulatory body has come up with a set of rules which changes plans, packages and pricing of TV channels by all operators like Airtel DTH, Tata Sky, Dish TV, Hathway Cable, Siti Cable, Sun DTH, etc.

Details

- Telecom Regulator has mandated that all DTH service providers must offer a base pack
 - * In plain words, it is the mandatory purchase that every TV subscriber has to buy in order to view TV.
 - * In order to view TV, a subscriber must choose at least 100 channels in the base pack.

- * As per the TRAI new rule, the maximum price of this pack will not be more than Rs 130 plus taxes.
- * For every 25 channels, you add to the list of 100, you pay ₹20 extra

- It mandates cable TV operators and DTH service providers to publish the tariffs for each channel called ala-carte as well as a combination of channels for a fixed price called bouquets.

- * The subscribers are free to choose from bouquets and ala-carte channel options.

- Consumer has complete freedom to choose their desired 100 Standard Definition (SD) channels within the network capacity fee of maximum Rs 130.
- TRAI also gives you the flexibility to add extra channels over the base pack. You can opt for additional channels on a-la-carte basis by paying for a slot

Significance

- Viewers will only pay for those channels that they want to see and don't end up paying unnecessarily for those that they don't want.

GEOGRAPHY

1. Delhi Rains

Context

- Delhi and surrounding areas in North India, witnessed inclement weather and this is attributed to a current spell of western disturbance that reached its peak in late January.

Western Disturbance

- IMD has pointed out that January is the month that sees the maximum number of western disturbance events, and the rain is "nothing unusual".
- A western disturbance is a rain-bearing wind system that originates beyond Afghanistan and Iran, picking up moisture from as far as the Mediterranean Sea, and even the Atlantic Ocean.
- The winds travel in the form of storms from the northwestern direction and cause frequent rainfall over Pakistan, North and Northwestern India, Uttarakhand, and some parts of the Gangetic plains. Sometimes the disturbances reach even the Northeast of India.
- The western disturbances are the primary reason for rainfall during the non-monsoon months in Northern and Eastern India. These wind systems sometimes build up four or five times a month, but not all of these necessarily result in rain.

2. Kaveri Crater

Context

- Two earth scientists were studying the impact of Asteroid in the southern part of India and this was funded by Union Ministry of Earth Sciences. After their investigations they have come to a conclusion that the land between present day Nilgiris and Kodaikanal is located on a crater formed by asteroid impact
- Their findings were published in the Journal of the Geological Society of India and the study won the Radhakrishna Prize 2018 for best paper.

Radhakrishna Prize

- This was instituted in the year 1995
- It is given to the author or authors of the best paper published in the journal of Geological Society of India during a calendar year in any branch of Earth Science.

Details

- The investigations included megascopic (visible to the naked eye) and microscopic studies of rocks along with analyses of chemical signatures.

- The scientists told that the Kaveri Crater is between Nilgiris and Kodaikanal.
- Both the Palghat Gap (a mountain pass) and Dhimbam Ghats are a part of the Kaveri Crater, with the geological evidence stretching up to Belakavadi and Shivanasamudra in Karnataka
- The asteroid hit may have taken place 800 million to 550 million years ago.
 - * Unlike the impact event that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs about 65 million years ago, this one took place when there were very primitive life forms.

3. Pepper Cultivation

- Black pepper is one of the popular spices and known as 'king of spices'.
- In India black pepper is mainly grown in Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Konkan, Pondicherry & Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- This spice has good economic importance due to its earnings of exports from foreign exchange. This spice is also called as "Black gold" due to its international trade factor.
- This spice was originated from Western Ghats of India
- This spice botanical name is "Piper nigrum" and belongs to the family of 'Piperaceae'

Climate Required for Black Pepper Farming

- Black pepper thrives best in tropical hot and humid climatic conditions
- It requires about 200 cm of annual rainfall.
- The ideal temperature for its successful growth is between 10c and 30c.
- The plant grows as a vine and needs support of other trees for its growth. It thrives well on deep, friable, well drained loamy soils, overlaying the lateritic hill tops of Western Ghats, though it can also be grown on red and laterite soils.
- This spice can be successfully cultivated at 1400 m above sea level
- A dry spell of at least a month before flowering is needed for fruit set

Production

- Karnataka has overtaken Kerala and become the country's leading pepper producer, accounting for 45% of the total production.

- The Centre's Spices Board data puts Karnataka ahead of Kerala. While Karnataka produced 33,000 metric tonnes of pepper in 2014-15, against Kerala's 28,000MT, the margin widened in 2015-16 as Karnataka's yield remained 33000MT and Kerala's fell to 26000MT.

Reasons for the decline in price:

- Pepper imports from Vietnam at cheaper rate through Sri Lanka continues to flood the market.
- These imports are being facilitated by the low-duty structure under the ASEAN (Association of South-East Nations) trade agreement, SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) and ISFTA (Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement).
- A minimum import price (MIP) of Rs.500 per kg on pepper was declared by the Commerce Ministry in 2018 to protect domestic pepper farmers but it had little impact.
- The pepper imported from Sri Lanka by Nepal and Bhutan through the Kolkata sea port also flows into the Indian market by road.
- In addition, illegal entry of pepper adds to the burden of pepper producers in the country.
- Smuggled pepper from Vietnam and Sri Lanka is available in consuming centres across the country at a cheaper price.
- Torrential rain in pepper-growing areas of Kerala and Karnataka caused a sharp decline in crop production.
- High moisture content owing to the rains has triggered fungal diseases like quick wilt and soft wilt.

Way forward

- Removal of Black pepper from the SAFTA and ISFTA import lists is a must in order to safeguard the interest of domestic growers.

4. Polar Vortex- Arctic Chill

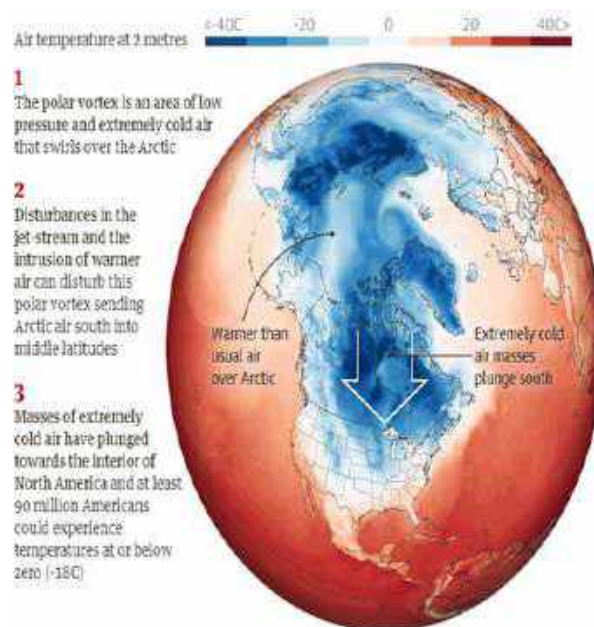
Context

- A blast of Arctic air from the polar vortex brought dangerous, bone-chilling cold to a wide swath of the United States

Causes

- The cause is a swirl of Arctic air that broke away from the polar vortex that usually encircles the North Pole.
- The polar vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air surrounding both of the Earth's poles. It always exists near the poles, but weakens in summer and strengthens in winter.
- The term "vortex" refers to the counter-clockwise flow of air that helps keep the colder air near the Poles
- Many times during winter in the northern hemisphere, the polar vortex will expand, sending cold air southward with the jet stream
- This occurs fairly regularly during wintertime and is often associated with large outbreaks of Arctic air in the United States.

- * The cold temperatures are caused by Arctic air masses drifting farther south than usual



Is this weather event linked to climate change?

- Studies have pointed to a recent increase in instances where the polar vortex has bulged down into heavily populated areas. Scientists are gaining a better understanding of why this is happening, with many identifying climate change as an influence.
- There's some evidence that the jet stream, a meandering air current that flows over North America and Europe, is slowing and becoming wavier as the planet warms.
 - * The jet stream interacts with the polar vortex, helping bring numbing temperatures further south.
- Scientists also point to a complex sequence of events involving sea ice, which is rapidly diminishing in the Arctic.
 - * As the ice retreats, summertime heat is absorbed by the dark ocean that lies underneath. This heat is released into the atmosphere during winter, spurring winds that can disrupt the polar vortex.

5. Shetrunji River

- It is in the state of Gujarat
- Shetrunji River originates from Gir Jungle and meets in cambay.
- The Shetrunji receives several tributaries on both the banks. There are 9 tributaries having length more than 15 km.
 - * Safara, Shel, Kharai and Talaji are four tributaries on the right bank
 - * Stali, Thebu, Gagadia, Rajawal and Kharo are on the left bank.

- Shetrunji dam is located on Shetrunji river which was raised for providing irrigation and drinking water to people in the region

6. Yalu River/Amrok River/ Amnok River

- It is a river on the border between North Korea and China.
- It empties into the Korea Bay between Dandong (China) and Sinuiju (North Korea).
- Sino-Korean Friendship Bridge or China-North Korea Friendship Bridge is a bridge across the Yalu River
- It connects the cities of Dandong in China and Sinuiju of North Korea via railway and roadway



7. What could happen to earth if its poles flipped?

The Earth's magnetic field is in a permanent state of change.

- Magnetic north drifts around and every few hundred thousand years the polarity flips so a compass would point south instead of north.
- The strength of the magnetic field also constantly changes and currently it is showing signs of significant weakening.
- Life has existed on the Earth for billions of years, during which there have been many reversals.
- There is no obvious correlation between animal extinctions and those reversals. Likewise, reversal patterns do not have any correlation with human development and evolution.
- It appears that some animals, such as whales and some birds use Earth's magnetic field for migration and direction finding.
- Since geomagnetic reversal takes a number of thousands of years, they could well adapt to the changing magnetic environment or develop different methods of navigation.

Impact

- Electric grid collapse from severe solar storms is a major risk. As the magnetic field continues to weaken, scientists are highlighting the importance off-the-grid energy systems using renewable energy sources to protect the Earth against a black out.
- The very highly charged particles can have a deleterious effect on the satellites and astronaut
- The Earth's climate could also change

8. Millions flock to Sagar Island in Bengal for Makar Sankranti

Context

- Close to 26 lakh devotees have arrived on Sagar Island to take a holy dip at the confluence of the Ganga and the Bay of Bengal on occasion of Makar Sankranti.

Details

- Sagar island is an island in the Ganges delta, lying on the continental shelf of Bay of Bengal, south of Kolkata.
- Although Sagar Island is a part of Sunderban Administration, it does not have any tiger habitation or mangrove forests or small river tributaries as is characteristic of the overall sunderban delta.
- Arrangements were made to ensure that the Gangasagar Mela is clean, 'Nirmal Mela'.
- Plastic was not allowed; arrangements were made to ensure flowers and other biodegradables were not allowed in the water.

HISTORY

1. Pietermaritzburg Incident

- Pietermaritzburg is a city in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province.
- On June 7, 1893, Mahatma Gandhi was thrown off the train's first class "whites-only" compartment at Pietermaritzburg station for refusing to give up his seat in spite of being holding ticket.
- The incident led him to develop his Satyagraha principles of peaceful resistance and mobilise people in South Africa and in India against the discriminatory rules of the British.

2. National Salt Satyagraha Memorial in Dandi

Context:

- Prime Minister dedicated the National Salt Satyagraha Memorial at Dandi in Navsari district, Gujarat to the nation on Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary.

Details:

- At the memorial site, PM also unveiled statues of Mahatma Gandhi and 80 Satyagrahis who had marched with him during the historic Dandi Salt March in 1930 to make salt from sea water against the British law.
- The memorial also has 24-narrative murals depicting various events and stories from the historic 1930 Salt March.
- Solar trees are installed to meet the energy requirements of the memorial complex.

About Dandi March:

- The Salt March began on March 12, 1930 and continued till April 6, 1930. It was a 24-day non-violent march led by Mahatma Gandhi.
- During that time, the British had prohibited Indians from collecting or selling salt. Indians were also forced to buy the staple diet ingredient from the British, who, not only exercised monopoly over its manufacture and sale but also levied a heavy salt tax. The Salt March was a collective beginning of a mass resistance movement against the British tyranny.
- Upon reaching the seashore in Dandi, Mahatma Gandhi broke the law by producing illegal salt. This later turned into a mass civil disobedience movement throughout India as millions broke salt laws by either making salt or buying illegal salt.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. Atang Ane

- Atang Ane (*Ficus elastica*) means 'mother rubber tree' in the Adi dialect.
- This is in Kallek Village a remote village under Pangin forest division in Siang district in Arunachal Pradesh
- This region accommodates the Adi community
- It attracts variety of birds so people are also popularizing trekking in this region so that they can bank on tourism
 - * Birds in the area include the great hornbill (the State bird), sunbird, white-tailed robin, barwing, collared treepie, parrotbill, and shrike babbler.

2. Bharat Ratna

- Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian award of the Republic of India. The provision of Bharat Ratna was introduced in 1954.
- Any person without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex is eligible for these awards. There is no written provision that Bharat Ratna should be awarded to Indian citizens only.
- It is awarded in recognition of exceptional service/performance of the highest order in any field of human endeavour.
- The award was originally limited to achievements in the arts, literature, science and public services but the government expanded the criteria to include "any field of human endeavour" in December 2011.
- In terms of Article 18 (1) of the Constitution, the award cannot be used as a prefix or suffix to the recipient's name. However, should an award winner consider it necessary, he/she may use the expression in their biodata/letterhead/visiting card etc. to indicate that he/she is a recipient of the award.

Context

- President Ramnath Kovind conferred the Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian honour, on former President Pranab Mukherjee, along with social activist Nanaji Deshmukh (posthumous), and Assamese musician Bhupen Hazarika (posthumous).

3. Global Misperceptions Index

- This survey is conducted by global research agency Ipsos MORI's
- The index is based on the findings of a study, called The Perils of Perception, which Ipsos MORI has been conducting for years.
- the study polls 1,000 respondents, aged 18-64, in each country on a number of issues and then stacks them up against data culled from official sources to arrive at the 'misperceptions' index.

- Admittedly, the survey is not representative. The sample is more urban and educated, and with higher incomes than their fellow citizens. These respondents are 'Upper Deck Consumer Citizens'. They are not nationally representative of their country."

Examples

- Most Indians overestimate the number of those unemployed — out of every 100 people of working age in India, Indians think 44% are unemployed and looking for work. The reality is that the number stands at just 4%.
- Indians tend to highly overestimate the percentage of the Muslim population in India, according to the survey. The average guess is around 32%, but in reality, Muslims constitute only 14% of the population. So, a plank of reverse majority discrimination, where the minority is presented as a threat to the actual majority, can work when the majority overestimates the size of the problem to start with.

Concerns

- Upper deck and non-representative they may be, but if this is what the educated, aware, online Indian thinks and feels about critical issues, its little wonder that India is the fake news capital of the world or that politicians are having a field day.
- The findings also hint at why certain political tropes resonate with the voters and what may work and what may not when the general election takes place.

Conte

Country	Rank	
Thailand	1	Least Accurate
Mexico	2	
Turkey	3	
Malaysia	4	
Brazil	5	
Colombia	6	
Russia	7	
Saudi Arabia	8	
China	9	
Peru	10	
Belgium	11	
India	12	
Romania	13	
Germany	14	
South Africa	15	
Singapore	31	
Denmark	32	
Great Britain	33	
Hungary	34	
Sweden	35	
New Zealand	36	
Hong Kong	37	Most accurate

4. **Labelling theory**

- This refers to a theory of social behaviour which states that the behaviour of human beings is influenced significantly by the way other members in society label them.
- It has been used to explain a variety of social behaviour among groups, including deviant criminal behaviour.
- According to this theory, individuals who are labelled as criminals by society, for instance, may be more likely to engage in criminal activities simply due to such social labelling.
- By the same logic, positive labelling by society can influence individuals to exhibit positive behaviour.

5. **M2M/ IoT Conference**

Context

- Machine-to-Machine (M2M) communication and the Internet-of-Things (IoT) conference was inaugurated by Minister of State for Communications

Details

- The conference was hosted by the Telecommunication Engineering Centre (TEC)
- The conference covered important topics such as IoT enabling Smart Infrastructure Verticals, different technologies and related use cases, Role of IoT in Smart Cities design and planning, various aspects related to Standardization in M2M/IoT, and Challenges in Security, Testing and Certification of Smart devices/equipment.
- M2M/IoT is being used in a large number of applications, across a number of verticals – such as Automotives(e.g. Intelligent Transport System), Power(e.g. Smart Metering, Smart Grid), Remote Health-Care, Safety & Surveillance, Smart Homes, Waste Management, and Water Management. Each of these verticals is relevant to the design and planning of Smart Cities.

6. **National conference on “Prison Design”**

Context

- The first ever National Conference on “Prison Design” will begin in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh The two-day conference is being sponsored by the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D).

Objectives of the conference:

- This conference aims to provide a platform to the sr. police officers, prison officers and Architects from Prison Department and Police Housing Corporation to meet and deliberate upon on the various issues relating with planning, Design and Constructions of prison keeping in view the safety and security need as well as administrative ease of day to day functioning of the prison.

- The idea of the conference is also to incorporate new construction technology, Information and Communication Technologies and modern safety and security gadgets in Prison Administration, besides ensuring a conducive living environment in a holistic sense.

7. **Paint Your Toilet**

Context

- In an effort to promote ownership and sustained usage of toilets and also provide a facelift to the crores of toilets built under the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has launched a month-long campaign, “Swachh Sundar Shauchalaya”

About:

- The campaign comprises a unique Contest, under which, households are being mobilised to paint and decorate their toilets. It will be spearheaded by Gram Panchayats and coordinated by district administrations.
- The campaign will involve rural communities in the 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across the country. Individual households, Gram Panchayats and Districts will be awarded on the basis of number of toilets painted and the quality and creativity of their work.
- The campaign has been rolled out across rural India and the Ministry is monitoring the progress through a specially designed portal. This campaign is one more innovative step by the Government to reinforce Swachh Bharat as a Jan Andolan
- The sanitation coverage in rural India has already crossed 98%, with over 9 crore toilets built under Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) since its launch.

8. **Roshni App**

Context

- In a bid to assist visually impaired people to easily determine denomination of currency notes, the Indian Institute of Technology at Ropar in Punjab has developed an Android App “Roshni”, using image processing and analytics.

Details

- The user has to bring the currency note in front of phone camera and the App would provide audio notification intimating the currency note denomination to the user.
- This App utilises an adaptable deep learning framework, which further uses the patterns and features embedded on the notes to differentiate and determine the currency denomination.
- Seeing AI is another similar tool developed by Microsoft which can also assist the low vision community.

What was the need?

- Earlier the visually impaired persons, differentiated the currencies based on the length and width of the note. But after demonetisation it became very difficult for them to identify the denomination, due to similarity in the sizes of new and old notes. To overcome this issue the app was designed

Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM)

- Tripura has launched the Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM) project which is undertaken with the assistance of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency).
- The SCATFORM project aims to address issues such as forest cover loss and forest degradation have been mainly caused by shifting cultivation, which increases soil erosion risks on hill slopes especially in upper catchment areas.
- It would be implemented mainly in upper catchments where forest degradation and soil erosion are severe and livelihood improvement needs are high. The project aims to improve quality of forest in the catchment area by sustainable forest management, soil and moisture conservation and livelihood development.
- The activities undertaken under the project involves promotion of bamboo plantation, agroforestry based livelihood, eco-tourism development, development of value addition for bamboo and other Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) in order to create alternate livelihood opportunities for local communities.
- The 80 per cent of the cost is contributed by JICA and the rest would be funded by the state and central government

9. Shehri Samridhi Utsav

- This is organized by Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation
- The event aims at extending the outreach of National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) to the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable, showcase its initiatives and facilitate access of SHG members to the other government schemes.

10. Shishir Saras

- It is a program initiated by Ministry of Rural Development
- It an exhibition of beautifully hand crafted rural products and traditional arts by rural artisans
 - * Aari and Sozni Work
 - * Handmade flowers and coir products
 - * Traditional Handcrafted Jewellery

Aari work

- It traces out its emergence way back in the 12th century, which marked the rule of the Mughal emperors
- Aari work has always been considered one of the most tedious forms of needle work.
- In this artwork beads and 'muthia', a sharp edged needle is put to work, which creatively gives rise to chain stitch kind of imprints.
- Aari work involves the implementation of a galore of beads and needles

Sozni embroidery

- It refers to needle in Kashmiri, the designs are made using a single needle to embroider the loom woven pashmina shawl.
- The shawls are embroidered in various motifs like floral, paisleys, borders, all over work etc with the help of a needle

11. Rural housing achieves only 66% target**Context**

- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen) scheme to provide housing for the rural poor has achieved only 66% of its target to complete one crore houses.
- The scheme has been successful in reducing the average time of construction from 314 days to 114 days, according to an official statement.
- However, there has been little headway with regard to one bloc of beneficiaries: the landless, who do not possess the land on which to construct the PMAY homes they are entitled to.
- In a letter to States dated January 4, the Ministry pointed out that only 12% of the 4.72 lakh identified landless beneficiaries had been provided land for house construction.

Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Rural)

- In pursuance to the goal – Housing for all by 2022, the rural housing scheme Indira Awas Yojana has been revamped to Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin) w.e.f. 1st April 2016. Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided for construction of pucca house to all houseless and households living in dilapidated houses in rural areas.

Salient features of the scheme

- Under the scheme, it is proposed to build four crore pucca houses in total, by the year 2022
- The selection of beneficiaries has been through a completely transparent process using the Socio-Economic Census 2011 data and validating it through the Gram Sabha.
- The finished houses come complete with facilities like toilets, liquefied petroleum gas connection, electricity connection, and drinking water availability

- The faster completion of quality houses has been assisted by payment of assistance directly into the beneficiary account through IT-DBT platform.
- PMAY-G, programme implementation and monitoring is to be carried out through an end to end e-Governance model- Using AwaasSoft and Awaas App.
- Space technology and IT platforms are being used to monitor the cycle of house construction, right from identification of beneficiary to construction stages of houses to completion and each stage is being geo-tagged
- The programme implementation is to be monitored not only electronically, but also through community participation (Social Audit), Member of Parliament (DISHA Committee), Central and State Government officials, National Level Monitors etc.
- Provision of assistance (Rs. 12,000/-) for toilets through convergence with Swaccha Bharat Mission
- The beneficiary is entitled to 90 days of unskilled labour from MGNREGA.
- To ensure good quality of house construction, Rural Mason Trainings have been organized to facilitate availability of trained masons in the rural areas. The programme provides for skilling 5 lakh Rural Masons by 2019.

12. Unique variety of pumpkin developed

Context

- A unique pumpkin variety without a hard seed coat has been developed by the Ludhiana-based Punjab Agricultural University.

Benefits:

- It is the first variety of 'soft' seeded pumpkin in India and its cultivation at commercial level will meet the domestic requirement of snack seed and bakery industry.
- It will offer opportunities for exports as oil of pumpkin seeds is used in cooking and salad dressing particularly in Europe and America, thus boosting the farmers' income.

Uses:

- Raw or roasted pumpkin seeds are used as snack food in many parts of the world.
- It is also used for cooking, baking, nutrient supplement and functional agent.
- Oil of pumpkin seeds is used in cooking and salad dressing.

13. Private FM channels permitted to carry all India radio news

What is it?

- Private FM Radio broadcasters would be permitted to broadcast All India Radio (AIR) News bulletins, in English/Hindi as per the list of bulletins given in News Schedule, subject to certain terms and conditions.

CONDITIONS FOR BROADCASTING:

- The AIR News bulletins shall have to be carried in toto, in an unaltered form.
- The commercials which are broadcast during news bulletins shall also have to be carried along with the news in toto.
- Private FM Broadcasters will have to give due credit to AIR for sourcing their news.
- The Private FM Broadcasters will have to carry AIR News bulletins either simultaneously or deferred live by not more than 30 minutes. In case of deferred live, an announcement should precede that it is a deferred live broadcast.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. The Gadgil Committee, recently in news, is related to

- A. Banking reforms
- B. Western Ghats
- C. Women empowerment
- D. Disabled persons

2. Consider the following statements:

- i. The Right to Property is not conferred to the citizens by the Constitution of India.
- ii. Fundamental Rights are available only against the arbitrary action of the State.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. i only
- B. ii only
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

3. Consider the following statements regarding the rights of minorities:

- i. Indian Constitution recognizes only religious minorities' rights.
- ii. The term minority has not been defined anywhere in the Constitution.
- iii. The right to protect the distinct language, script or culture of a section of people under Article 29 is available only to the minorities.

Which of the above is/are NOT correct?

- A. Only i and ii
- B. Only i and iii
- C. Only iii
- D. All of the above

4. With reference to Money Bill, which of the following statements is incorrect?

- A. It can be introduced only by a Minister.
- B. It can be introduced only on the recommendation of the President.
- C. It can be retained by the Rajya Sabha for maximum period of two months only.
- D. None of the above

5. Consider the following statements with respect to impeachment procedure of the President of India:

- i. The impeachment of the President is a quasi-judicial procedure in the Parliament.
- ii. The nominated members of either House of Parliament cannot participate in the impeachment of the President though they do participate in his/her election.
- iii. The elected members of the legislative assemblies of States and union territories do not participate in the impeachment.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. All of the above

6. Under what conditions President, if satisfied can declare National Emergency?

- i. When the security of the country is under threat
- ii. Internal disturbance
- iii. External aggression

Select the correct code:

- A. All of the above
- B. Only i and iii
- C. Only i
- D. Only ii and iii

7. With reference to "Kadaknath chicken", recently in news, which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- i. The famous Kadaknath chicken meat from Jhabua district of Rajasthan has now got a Geographical Indication (GI) tag.
- ii. Kadaknath is locally known as Kalamasi and is used for treatment of many diseases, besides being considered an aphrodisiac.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

8. Ujh River was seen in news, is a tributary of the river:

- A. Ravi
- B. Sutlej
- C. Kishanganga
- D. Kaveri

9. Consider the following statements:

- i. Article 19 of the Indian Constitution shall be suspended, if any part of the territory is under threat due to armed rebellion.
- ii. Article 20 and 21 of the Indian Constitution are not suspended even during National Emergency.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. only i
- B. only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

10. The selection of the Chairperson and the members of Lokpal shall be through a Selection Committee consisting of:

- i. Prime Minister
- ii. Speaker Legislative Assembly
- iii. The Chief Justice of India

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- A. Only i and ii
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. All of the above

11. With reference to Central Water Commission, which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- i. It is a premier Technical Organization under the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- ii. CWC has organized International Dam Safety Conference 2018 in association with Kerala state government.

Select the correct code:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

12. With reference to UIDAI, sometimes seen in news which of the following statements is/are correct?

- i. It is a statutory authority.
- ii. It works under the aegis of Ministry of Social Welfare.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

13. With reference to Dam Rehabilitation Improvement Project (DRIP), which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- i. The project aims to improve safety and operational performance of the Dams.
- ii. The funds for the project will be shared by New Development Bank.

Select the correct answer code:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

14. With reference to Regional Integrated Multi-hazard Early Warning System (RIMES) for Africa and Asia, consider the following statements:

- i. It is an Intergovernmental body, registered with the United Nations.
- ii. South Africa is the chairman of the body.
- iii. It was created after 2004 Tsunami which brought together countries of Asian-Africa.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i and ii
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. All of the above

15. With reference to the Finance Commission, select the correct statements:

- i. The Commission submits its recommendations to the Parliament.
- ii. The first Finance Commission was set up under the chairmanship of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in 1951..

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

16. "Momentum for Change: Climate Neutral Now" is an initiative launched by

- i. The tax imposed on the stock market and futures market belong to the Union List.
- ii. The tax imposed on the stock market and futures market is collected and appropriated by the States.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. None of the above

17. Which of the following cyclones is not associated with the Indian Ocean?

- A. Phethai
- B. Ockhi
- C. Roanu
- D. Rina

18. Consider the following statements about the functions of Department Related Standing Committee:

- i. These Committees consider matters of day-to-day administration of the concerned Ministries/Departments.
- ii. These committees consider Annual Reports.
- iii. Examination of Bills referred to by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha or the Speaker, Lok Sabha as the case may be can be taken up by them.
- iv. They can consider Demands for Grants.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are incorrect?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only ii, iii and iv
- D. All of the above

19. Which of the following organizations brings out the publication known as 'World Happiness Report'?

- A. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)
- B. The United Nations Development Programme
- C. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)
- D. The World Bank

20. Consider the following statements about Aadhaar card:

- i. It can be verified online without having a printed copy of Aadhaar Card.
- ii. In 2017, Aadhaar was officially declared as a 'Hindi Word Of The Year' by Oxford Dictionary.
- iii. Aadhaar Card is not mandatory for every citizen, it is voluntary based, and anyone who wants to enrol himself voluntarily can apply for an Aadhaar number.
- iv. The Aadhar number does not have a lifetime validity.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only ii
- B. Only i and iii
- C. i, ii and iii only
- D. All of the above

21. Consider the following statements:

- i. National Green Tribunal
- ii. Telecom Regulatory Authority of India
- iii. National Commission for Women
- iv. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

Which of the following is/are non-statutory body?

- A. Only ii
- B. Only i and iii
- C. Only ii and iv
- D. Only i, ii and iv
- E.

22. Consider the following statements:

- i. The powers, salaries, allowances of Chief Election Commissions and other Election Commissioners are equal.
- ii. The term of the Chief Election Commissioner is 6 years or of the age of 70 years (whichever is earlier).

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. i only
- B. ii only
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

23. Sills, dykes and lopoliths is typical characteristics of

- A. Extrusive volcanic landforms
- B. Intrusive volcanic landforms
- C. Landforms due to glaciation
- D. Faulting

24. Atmospheric Brown Cloud is:

- A. A cloud made up of 'black carbon' containing soot and smog.
- B. Name of Cloud services provided by Amazon Web Services
- C. Upcoming Project of ISRO to launch a weather satellite
- D. Recent Mission of UNEP to combat forest fires.

25. The Election Commission of India conducts the election for the vacant post of the

- i. President
- ii. State Legislative Assemblies
- iii. Speaker

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- A. All of the above
- B. Only i and iii
- C. Only i and ii
- D. Only ii

26. Which of the following elections are conducted by indirect system of election?

- i. The head of the Panchayats
- ii. Vice President of India
- iii. Members of Legislative Assemblies

Select the correct code:

- A. All of the above
- B. Only ii
- C. Only i and ii
- D. Only i

27. Which of the following statements about Jovian planets is incorrect?

- A. They are also known as Gas Giant Planets.
- B. Jovian planets are Jupiter like planet.
- C. Most of them are much larger than the terrestrial planets
- D. These planets are formed in the different period as compared to the terrestrial planets.

28. Which of the following could be an impact of a policy which increases money supply?

- A. Increase in interest rate
- B. Decrease in interest rate
- C. Increase in imports
- D. Inflow of foreign capital

29. Arrange the following in decreasing order of liquidity:

- i. Demand Deposits
- ii. Fixed Deposits
- iii. Gold
- iv. Cash

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. iii-iv-i-ii
- B. ii-i-iv-iii
- C. iv-iii-i-ii
- D. ii-i-iii-iv

30. Which of the following situation correctly describes "bank run"?

- A. When everybody wants to take money out of one's bank account before the bank runs out of its reserves
- B. When the bank fails to fulfil its SLR requirements
- C. When the bank has to resort to RBI lending to meet its liquidity requirements
- D. When more than 50% Public Sector Banks accounts for 75% of Non- Performing Assets

31. Consider the following about bioplastics:

- i. There is largest gap between the 0° latitude and 1° latitude.
- ii. Latitude is the angular measurement of the point on the earth from Prime Meridian.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

32. Which of the following steps are used for contractionary monetary policy?

- i. Increasing Cash Reserve Ratio
- ii. Increasing Repo Rate
- iii. Decreasing Statutory Liquidity Ratio

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. Only i and iii
- B. Only i and ii
- C. Only ii and iii
- D. Only iii

33. The demand for money is likely to:

- i. Increase with increase in income levels of the population
- ii. Decrease with increase in income levels of the population
- iii. Increase with increase in interest rate in the economy
- iv. Decrease with increase in interest rate in the economy

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. Only i and iv
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. Only ii and iv

34. Consider the following Terms /Context / Topic

- i. Belle 2 experiment – Artificial Intelligence
- ii. Block chain technology – Digital Crypto currency
- iii. CRISPR – Cas9 – Particle Physics

Which of the pairs given above is/are correctly matched?

- A. i and iii only
- B. ii only
- C. ii and iii only
- D. i, ii and iii

35. Which of the following indicators is related to poverty measurement?

- A. Head Count Ratio
- B. Ginni- coefficient
- C. Laffer curve
- D. Kuznets curve

36. Which of the following measure have been used by the government to address the situation of poverty in India?

- i. Development oriented growth measures
- ii. Meeting the minimum needs of the poor.
- iii. Specific poverty alleviation programmes

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. All of the above

37. Consider the following statements about Dr. Rangarajan poverty estimation methodology:

- i. It reverted to system of separate poverty line category for rural and urban areas.
- ii. It recommended use of “modified mixed reference period”

Which of the above statement(s) is/ are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

38. Consider the following for Sakhi centres:

- i. One Stop Centre (OSC) approved under the Nirbhaya Fund is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- ii. The OSC supports all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence, irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status.
- iii. The scheme envisages an OSC for medical, legal, psychological and police help for victims of gender-based abuse such as sexual assault or domestic violence.

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only ii
- B. Only i
- C. Only i and ii
- D. All of the above

39. Consider the following statements about 2+2 dialogue:

- i. The ‘2+2’ dialogue is a meeting between the India Ministers for External Affairs and Defense, and the US Secretaries of State and Defense.
- ii. This “2+2” dialogue was meant to replace the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue between the foreign and commerce ministers of the two countries that was held during the previous Obama administration.
- iii. It is to focus on “strengthening strategic, security and defense cooperation” between the two countries.

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only iii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. All of the above

40. Consider the following statements about Asian Water bird Census:

- i. The AWC is an integral part of the global water bird monitoring programme, the International Water bird Census (IWC).
- ii. The AWC was initiated in 1987 in the Indian subcontinent and covers the entire East Asian – Australasian Flyway and a large part of the Central Asian Flyway
- iii. It is coordinated by Wetlands International.
- iv. Its objective is to monitor on an annual basis the status and condition of wetlands.

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only iii
- C. Only i, ii and iii
- D. All of the above

41. Consider the following about Law Commission of India:

- i. It is a non-statutory body constituted by the Government of India from time to time.
- ii. It is reconstituted every three years.
- iii. The current Law commission is the 22nd Law Commission of India.

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only iii
- C. Only i and ii
- D. All of the above

42. Which of the following countries do not share its border with Uzbekistan?

- A. Tajikistan
- B. Turkmenistan
- C. Pakistan
- D. Afghanistan

43. Consider the following with respect to Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) Scheme:

- i. It is a 100% Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- ii. The scheme has been launched to provide connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

44. Consider the following statements:

- i. The origin of sedition law in India is linked to the Wahabi Movement of 19th century.
- ii. The Sedition Act was first invoked against Bal Gangadhar Tilak in respect of certain articles published in the "Kesari".

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

45. Increasing unemployment and inflation is a situation of

- A. Hyperinflation
- B. Galloping inflation
- C. Stagflation
- D. Deflation

46. Consider the following statements:

- i. Chakmas are Hindu and Hajongs are Buddhist Refugees.
- ii. Chakmas' language is close to Bengali-Assamese and Hajongs speak a Tibeto-Burman tongue written in Assamese.

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

47. Recently, India has suggested Nine Point Agenda to G-20 is related

- A. Action Against Fugitive Economic Offences And Asset Recovery
- B. To end terrorism in all forms and manifestations
- C. Highlight the issue of Environmental degradation
- D. For uniting countries to deal with challenges associated with Poverty

48. Which of the following countries are member of Both Shanghai Cooperation Organization and East Asia Summit?

- i. Brunei
- ii. China
- iii. India
- iv. Pakistan

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- A. only
- B. i and iii only
- C. ii only
- D. ii and iii only

49. Johannesburg Declaration was recently in the news is adopted by which of the following grouping.

- A. G-20
- B. BRICS
- C. ASEAN
- D. SCO

50. Consider the following statement regarding Border Roads Organisation (BRO)

- i. It functions under Ministry of Highways and Transport
- ii. BRO develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and as well as in neighbouring countries.

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- A. i only
- B. ii only
- C. i and ii both
- D. Neither i and ii

51. Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct regarding public goods?

- A. Public goods are excludable but non rivalrous
- B. Public goods are non- excludable but rivalrous
- C. Public goods are neither excludable nor rivalrous
- D. Public goods are both excludable and rivalrous

52. Which of the following taxes form part of receipts of revenue account of budget in India?

- i. Income tax
- ii. Corporation tax
- iii. Customs duty

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. Only i and ii
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. All of the above

53. Consider the following statement regarding The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS)

- i. European Union to head The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) from 1st January 2019
- ii. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) is to prevent "conflict diamonds" from entering the mainstream rough diamond market by United Nations General Assembly Resolution.

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- A. i only
- B. ii only
- C. i and ii both
- D. Neither i and ii

54. Ex Cope India-18 is a Bilateral Joint exercise between which of the following countries.

- A. India and USA
- B. India and Russia
- C. India and Japan
- D. India and China

55. If the Earth is not tilted on its axis and it performs only revolutionary motion, which of the following phenomena will occur?

- i. Phenomena of Day and Night
- ii. Varying lengths of Day and Night
- iii. Seasonal change

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only iii
- D. All of the above

56. Consider the following statements about Mandana paintings.

- i. It is done on the floor and walls as a mark of celebration and to protect home and earth.
- ii. The art is typically passed on from mother to daughter and uses white khariya or chalk solution and geru or red ochre.

Which of the statements given above are correct.

- A. i only
- B. ii only
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

57. Consider the following statements about Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP).

- i. It seeks to empower Tiger Range Country (TRCs) to address the entire spectrum of threats, domestic as well as trans-boundary related to tigers.
- ii. It has a shared goal of doubling the number of wild tigers globally by 2022.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. i only
- B. ii only
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

58. Consider the following statements regarding revenue expenditure:

- i. Revenue expenditure consists of all those expenditures that result in creation of assets
- ii. It includes those expenses that are incurred for the normal functioning of the government departments

Which of the above statement(s) is/ are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

59. With reference to International Dateline, consider the following statements:

- i. It is not a perfect straight line
- ii. While crossing International Date Line from Marshal Island to Hawaii Island, a person gains a day.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

60. Consider the following about E-way bills:

- i. E-way bill or Electronic-way bill is a document introduced under the GST regime that needs to be generated after transporting or shipping goods.
- ii. In case of serious allegations of corruption against the ministry of the state.
- iii. The physical copy of e-way bill must be present with the transporter or the person in charge of the conveyance.
- iv. The E-way bill should include information such as goods, recipient, consignor and transporter.

Which of these is/are incorrect?

- A. i only
- B. ii only
- C. iii and iv only
- D. ii, iii and iv

61. Consider the following about Lymphatic filariasis:

- i. Lymphatic filariasis is caused by infection with parasites.
- ii. Lymphatic filariasis is transmitted by different types of mosquitoes for example by the Culex mosquito, widespread across urban and semi-urban areas, Anopheles, mainly found in rural areas, and Aedes, mainly in endemic islands in the Pacific.
- iii. The infection is usually acquired in childhood, causing hidden damage to the lymphatic system.

Which of these is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Only ii and iii
- D. All of the above

62. In which of the following states/Union territory is Pulicat Lake situated?

- i. Tamil Nadu
- ii. Andhra Pradesh
- iii. Telangana

Which of the codes is correct?

- A. Only I
- B. Only II
- C. Only I and II
- D. I, II and III

63. Consider the following about the recently excavated Asurgarh Fort:

- i. It is situated in Odisha's Kalahandi district.
- ii. It is believed that the people of Asurgarh during that time probably used stone rubbles and tile fragments for flooring their houses and the streets.
- iii. Glass bangle pieces of different designs and colours, sling balls, pestle, iron equipment like small wheel, ring, and arrow head were also found.
- iv. The findings of coral beads and imperial variety of silver punch mark coins indicated the long distant trade and association of hinterland people with seafaring people.

Which of the following is /are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. i, ii, iii and iv

64. Which of the following is not inscribed in the UNESCO intangible heritage site?

- A. Kuttiyattam
- B. Mudi yettu
- C. Navroz
- D. Ottamthullal

65. Consider the following statements about Agro Tech India – 2018

- i. It is Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)'s flagship agri fair.
- ii. Iran is partner country at the CII Agro Tech 2018.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both ii and iii
- D. Neither i nor ii

66. Consider the following statements.

- i. First-past-the post system is a method in which a member is considered elected on the basis of highest received votes.
- ii. In India, the system of Proportional Representation is quite popular in State Legislative Assemblies and House of the People.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

67. Consider the following statements

- i. No DPSP is given preference over any Fundamental Right.
- ii. DPSPs have been included in part IV-A of the Indian Constitution.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

68. Consider the following statement regarding Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

- i. It was established in 1989 during the G-20 Summit in Paris (France) to combat the growing problem of money laundering.
- ii. FATF does not deal with terrorism financing.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i and ii

69. Consider the following statements

- i. Assertion (A): Repayment of loan is a part of capital expenditure of government budget
- ii. Reason (R): Repayment of loans reduces liability of the government

Choose an option that correctly describes the relation between assertion and reason:

- A. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- B. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- C. A is true but R is false
- D. A is false but R is true

70. Consider the following statements

- i. Assertion (A): Increased savings does not always lead to higher investments
- ii. Reason (R): Equality between savings and investments gives equilibrium level of income

Choose an option that correctly describes the relation between assertion and reason:

- A. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- B. Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
- C. A is true but R is false
- D. A is false but R is true

71. Consider the following about OPEC

- i. OPEC is an intergovernmental organisation aimed towards stabilisation of global oil prices.
- ii. Qatar is a member of OPEC

Select the correct option from below

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

72. Consider the following statement regarding Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

- i. The number of recognized disability conditions has been increased from 7 to 21
- ii. Acid attack survivors are not included in the list.
- iii. It has provided for reservation in vacancies in government establishment for disabled person.

Choose the correct statement

- A. i and ii only
- B. i and iii only
- C. ii and iii only
- D. i, ii and iii

73. With reference to a National Park, consider the following statements:

- i. It is located at the junction of the Aravalis and the Vindhyas.
- ii. It is bounded in north by Banas river and in south by Chambal river.
- iii. It is under Project Tiger.

Which of following National Park has all of the above characteristics?

- A. Bandhavagarh National Park
- B. Ranthambore National Park
- C. Kanha National Park
- D. Gaurumara National Park

74. Consider the following statements regarding Article 13

- i. A constitutional amendment is not a law and hence cannot be challenged
- ii. The term "law" as mentioned in Article 13 includes permanent laws enacted by the Parliament only

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. All of the above

75. With reference to the Fundamental Duties which of the following statements is incorrect?

- i. Anti-Defection Law was introduced by 52nd Constitution Amendment Act, 1985, by adding 10th Schedule in the Constitution of India.
- ii. Anti-Defection Law was never amended again.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

76. The above statements represent which of the following committee?

- A. Ethics Committee
- B. Committee of Privileges
- C. Committee on Petition
- D. Rules Committee

77. The project "Development of Tribal Circuit" is sanctioned under which Ministry

- A. Ministry of Human resources and Development
- B. Ministry of tribal Affairs
- C. Ministry of Tourism
- D. Ministry of Culture

78. Consider the following statements regarding Geographical Indication (GI)

- i. GIs are typically used for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, but not industrial products.
- ii. GI tags last up to a term of 10 years, and cannot be renewed

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii only
- D. Neither i and ii

79. Net population size in an area will increase if

- A. If both birth rate and death rate is high
- B. If birth rate is high, but death rate is low
- C. If birth rate is low, but death rate is high
- D. If immigration rate is lower than emigration rate

80. Consider the following codes:

Mountain Ranges	Continent
i. Andes	South America
ii. Alps	Europe
iii. Atlas	Africa
iv. Appalachian	North America

Which of the above codes is/are correctly matched?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii and iv
- C. i, ii and iii
- D. All of the above

81. Consider the following statements about Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme recently launched in Odisha:

- i. More than 50 lakh families, including sharecroppers and landless families will be covered under the scheme.
- ii. Farmers will get the cash assistance during the six crop seasons over a period of three years.
- iii. Crop loans up to Rs 50,000 will be interest-free under the scheme.

Which of the following is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only iii
- C. Only i and iii
- D. All of the above

82. Consider the following statements about Annual Status of Education Report:

- i. Annual Status of Education Report (commonly known as the ASER report), is a household-based survey conducted by NGO PRATHAM.
- ii ASER is the only annual source of data on children's learning outcomes available in India today.
- iii. ASER Centre implements large- and small-scale research studies addressing a variety of domains both in education and in other social sectors such as health, nutrition, water and sanitation.
- iv. Estimates of children's schooling and learning status are generated at district, state and national levels.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only iii
- C. Only i, ii and iii
- D. All of the above

83. Consider the following about Microplastics:

- i. Plastic in the environment breaks down into microscopic particles that can end up in the guts and gills of marine life, exposing the animals to chemicals in the plastic.
- ii. They act like sponges that soak up contaminants and microbes and can ultimately work their way into our food supply.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

84. Consider the following code:

Tiger Reserve	River
i. Satkosia	Mahanadi
ii. Ranthambore	Chambal
iii. Manas	Manas
iv. Simplipal	Baitarni

Which of the above codes is/are correctly matched?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii and iv
- C. Only i, ii and iii
- D. All of the above

85. Consider the following Assertion (A) and Reason (R) provided for it

- i. Assertion (A): Satellite used to operate satellite phones are generally found in low earth orbit
- ii. Reason (R): Satellites in the low earth orbit are stationary with respect to any point on earth and thus simplify the operation of antenna.

Which of the following is correct relation between Assertion and Reason?

- A. Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
- B. Both A and R are true and R is not correct explanation of A
- C. A is true but R is false
- D. A is false but R is true

86. India had launched Cartosat-2 series of satellites for earth observation purposes. In which of the following orbits were the satellites placed?

- A. Low Earth Orbit
- B. Middle Earth Orbit
- C. Geo- Synchronous Orbit
- D. Geo- Stationary Orbit

87. Consider the following statements regarding communication satellite orbit:

- i. Communication satellite is always put in geo-stationary orbit
- ii. Geo- stationary orbit relieves the need of constant movement of antenna along with the movement of satellite

Choose the correct answer from the codes given below:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

88. ISRO had conducted the Air Breathing and Propulsion Experiment using Rohini series of rocket. Rohini forms part of which of the following families of launchers by ISRO?

- A. PSLV
- B. GSLV
- C. Sounding Rockets
- D. None of the above

89. Long Term Evolution (LTE) refers to which of the following?

- A. A brand of mobile phones
- B. A mobile operating system
- C. A wireless cellular mobile communication technology
- D. An android music app

90. Consider the following statements regarding Scrub Typhus

- i. It is an acute illness in humans caused by a bacterium.
- ii. It is transmitted by the bite of infected mite larva present in the soil.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

91. Consider the following statements regarding Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark II (GSLV Mk II):

- i. This fourth generation launch vehicle is a four stage vehicle with four liquid strap-ons.
- ii. The indigenously developed flight proven Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS) forms the third stage of GSLV Mk II.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

92. Consider the following statements regarding Orion Spacecraft:

- i. It is a human spacecraft for deep-space missions
- ii. It is the second such initiative by any country and first initiative of China

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

93. Who publishes the Pneumonia and Diarrhea Progress Report?

- A. WHO
- B. Lancet International
- C. International Vaccine Access Centre
- D. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

94. Consider the following statements

- i. An interim Budget is a complete set of accounts, including both expenditure and receipts.
- ii. It made by the government just before the election.

Select the correct ones

- A. only i
- B. only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

95. Consider the following statements regarding India Water Impact Summit 2018

- i. It was organised jointly by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and the UNEP.
- ii. The 2018 Summit introduced the inaugural Ganga Financing Forum that will bring a number of institutions to a common knowledge, information and partnership platform

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. only i
- B. only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

96. Recently, the species Sumatran, Amur (Siberian), Malayan, Amoy (South China) and Indochinese in news, belongs to the category of

- A. Subspecies of Tiger
- B. Migratory Bird
- C. Turtles
- D. Tribal groups in Indonesia island

97. Consider the following statements regarding Namdapha National Park

- i. It is India's only reserve to have four big cat species — the tiger, leopard and the severely endangered clouded and snow leopards
- ii. Noa-Dihing River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra flows through Namdapha National Park.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- A. only i
- B. only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. Neither i nor ii

98. With reference to RTI Act 2005, consider the following statements:

- i. RTI Act derives its authority from the Article 19 of the Indian Constitution.
- ii. The agencies with strategic importance like NIA, RAW etc. are exempted under the Act.

Select the correct code:

- A. Only i
- B. Only ii
- C. Both i and ii
- D. None of the above

99. Which of the following languages is/are included in the Eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution?

- i. English
- ii. Maithili
- iii. Nepali
- iv. Rajasthani

Select the correct code:

- A. Only i and ii
- B. Only ii and iii
- C. Only i, ii and iv
- D. Only iii and iv

100. Consider the following about the Senior Citizens Welfare Fund.

- i. It was established along with the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB).
- ii. It will be administered by an Inter-Ministerial Committee.
- iii. The fund shall not be audited by the CAG due to its fundamental character as a welfare fund.

Select the correct answer using the codes below.

- A. Only ii
- B. Only i and iii
- C. Only i and ii
- D. Only ii and iii

ANSWER KEYS

Question No	Answer Keys
1.	B
2.	D
3.	B
4.	C
5.	C
6.	B
7.	B
8.	A
9.	B
10.	C
11.	B
12.	A
13.	A
14.	C
15.	D
16.	C
17.	D
18.	A
19.	A
20.	C
21.	C
22.	A
23.	B
24.	A
25.	C

Question No	Answer Keys
26.	B
27.	D
28.	B
29.	C
30.	A
31.	D
32.	B
33.	A
34.	B
35.	A
36.	D
37.	C
38.	D
39.	D
40.	D
41.	C
42.	C
43.	B
44.	A
45.	C
46.	B
47.	A
48.	D
49.	B
50.	B

Question No	Answer Keys
51.	C
52.	D
53.	B
54.	A
55.	C
56.	C
57.	C
58.	B
59.	C
60.	A
61.	D
62.	C
63.	D
64.	D
65.	A
66.	A
67.	D
68.	D
69.	A
70.	B
71.	A
72.	B
73.	B
74.	D
75.	A

Question No	Answer Keys
76.	B
77.	C
78.	D
79.	B
80.	D
81.	D
82.	D
83.	C
84.	C
85.	C
86.	A
87.	B
88.	C
89.	C
90.	C
91.	B
92.	A
93.	C
94.	C
95.	B
96.	A
97.	C
98.	C
99.	B
100.	A

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. Recently India has witnessed some of the lowest temperatures recorded in last two decades in its northern states. In this context, examine the reasons behind the same.
2. The government has recently rolled out a national strategy for artificial intelligence (AI) and identified five sectors – health care, agriculture, education, infrastructure and transportation for its adoption. Analyse the impact of AI in these sectors?
3. The incident in Meghalaya where miners are trapped in one of the rat-hole mines exposes the issues with this unsafe mining practice. Despite a ban, rat-hole mining remains a prevalent practice in Meghalaya. Explain the process of rat hole mining and the issues associated with it?
4. The progress shown by some of the districts under the aspirational districts programme leads us to harbour belief that sustained focus on the progress of these districts would enable us to bridge the developmental gap. In this context, examine the role of aspirational districts programme in bridging the development gap is vital to social and political stability.
5. Many political parties and politicians have called for reforms in the GST structure and there have been calls to bring GST 2.0, a revised and more progressive GST regime. In this context discuss the need for reforms in the current GST structure.
6. Online shopping has witnessed a very high growth rate in India and is bound to further increase in future. Indian government has recently issued some new rules for e-commerce. In this context discuss the new rules and their possible impact on the various stakeholders.
7. India is one of the largest CO₂ emitting nations in the world and this trend is going to increase for a certain period of time. Coal is a cheap and fairly abundant source of energy but it has its own problems which call for phasing out its production and use. Discuss.
8. The Cabinet of the central government has recently given its nod to introduce certain amendments to the POCSO Act, 2012. Critically evaluate the amendments proposed by the government in relation to POCSO act, 2012.
9. Recently Chinese spacecraft Chang'e-4, successfully made a landing on the dark side of the moon. Write a note on the importance of this mission.
10. Examine the series of steps taken by the government to address the woes faced by MSME sector due to demonetization and GST introduction.
11. Recently the government announced linking of Aadhaar card with driving license, In light of recent developments critically analyse the linking of Aadhaar with various platforms.
12. Implementation of various provisions to protect the tribals have not been successful. Discuss the challenges faced by the indigenous communities of India.
13. Industries and services are concentrated in high density economically developed area and engines of growth have failed to spread to less dense secondary cities. Discuss the statement in the context of India.
14. Recently Vijay Mallya has become the first person to be declared a fugitive economic offender. In this context, explain the provisions of fugitive economic offenders act, 2018 and critically examine its impact?
15. The Lok Sabha has passed the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018 that allows regulated use of DNA technology to establish the identity of certain defined categories of persons, including offenders, suspects, and undertrials. It is expected that the expanded use of DNA technology would result not only in speedier justice delivery but also in increased conviction rates. Discuss
16. The plan to introduce reservation in jobs for economically weaker sections of the upper castes in India points out the growing concerns about employment growth in India. In this context write a note on the jobless growth of India suggesting some feasible solutions.

17. Sikkim's ruling party, the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), recently declared to include the Universal Basic Income scheme in its manifesto ahead of the Assembly election in 2019 and aims to implement it by 2022. In this context, write a note on the pros and cons of the universal basic income.
18. The government has recently passed a bill in Lok Sabha which gives reservations in employment to economically weaker but socially higher caste people of India. In this context, discuss the constitutional provisions related to reservation for Indian citizens.
19. National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) has to adopt appropriate approaches for small and big cities according to their dominant pollution profile while several strategies may remain uniform. Discuss
20. India is ranked at 41 in the recently released Democracy Index 2018. It is still classified as a 'flawed democracy' according to the index. Analyse the recent report in the context of India's performance.
21. The government has announced the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP). This is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target. Discuss the key features of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)
22. Demographic dividend is said to be occurring when the ratio of the working age population is high and the dependency ratio in terms of proportion of children and elderly people low. Analyse the concept of demographic dividend in the context of India
23. Discuss the importance of India-Central Asia Dialogue recently held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.
24. How far the One Stop Centre have been successful in solving crimes against women. Analyze.
25. How far is it justified for India to retain the Sedition law introduced by the British to suppress the freedom struggle, when Britain itself abolished it years ago?
26. Are some illegal immigrants more equal than the others? Comment in the light of Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019.
27. The sedition law should be invoked only in cases "where intention" behind the act is to "disrupt public order or to overthrow the Government with violence and illegal means". Analyse this statement with respect to the sedition law of India
28. Two new studies on the devadasi practice by the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai, paint a grim picture of the indifferent approach of the legislature and enforcement agencies to crack down on the practice. What is Devadasi Practice? Suggest some feasible strategies to eliminate this practice from our society
29. Collegium system has its concerns as absolute power is not desirable in any branch of the State. The need of the hour is to revisit the existing system through a transparent and participatory procedure, preferably by an independent broad-based constitutional body guaranteeing judicial primacy but not judicial exclusivity. Analyse the statement
30. Karnataka is currently reeling under an outbreak of monkey fever or Kyasanur forest disease (KFD). Authorities are taking measures, including vaccination to combat the disease and spread of it in the state. In this context, write a note on the disease by
31. SAARC has failed to perform its role as an integrator and to address areas of common interests. Critically evaluate the statement
32. As India becomes increasingly digital and its population grows gradually, it is poised to become the top destination of technology companies. However, India also poses several unique challenges to such companies. Discuss
33. Recently India has witnessed some of the lowest temperatures recorded in last two decades. In this context, examine the reasons behind the same.
34. Examine the major issues in the India Pakistan relations with special reference to Gilgit-Baltistan province.
35. Child labour impedes the growth of a thriving economy. Discuss in the context of child labour in India.
36. Although the Kumbh Mela is spiritual and religious in nature, the economic benefits associated with it is huge. Elucidate.
37. Rat-hole mining has to be regulated and not banned as it will impact the livelihood of many people. Critically examine.
38. India is still a technology importing nation by large. It resisted various moves of the developed countries on the issues of patent laws. In this context write a note on the Draft Patents Rules, released by the Ministry of Commerce.

39. 1. Brexit is an opportunity for India to reset the legal terms of its trade with the UK and EU, at the multilateral level, and through free trade agreements. In this context, write a note on Brexit by highlighting its impact on India.
40. A unified national market, a freer export regime and abolition of the Essential Commodities Act are essential to boost agricultural growth. Examine
41. During the last 18 years, India has earned goodwill cutting across Afghanistan's geographies and ethnicities. India has supported institution building and shown that its interests coincide with the idea of a stable, secure, independent and peaceful Afghanistan. In this context write a note on the India-Afghanistan relation in the contemporary times with special emphasis on the impact of America's withdrawal from Afghanistan.
42. CRISPR has made gene editing cheap, easy and accessible. No doubt CRISPR is a revolutionary gene-editing tool, but it's not without risk. Discuss
43. The presence of micro plastics in water bodies is a growing concern. Discuss the environmental impacts of micro plastics.
44. Discuss various issues and challenges of Farmer Producers Organisation (FPO).
45. Government is not only the biggest litigator but also the greatest threat to the abuse of power. Judicial review as a concept is supposed to control the government and keep it in check. Discuss the statement in the context of India.
46. In trade wars, the objective is not to settle a dispute; it is to win the battle. The WTO dispute settlement mechanism is not a world trade court. The process remains political and diplomatic. Examine the statement
47. NCAP is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target. Discuss the key features of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)
48. Roll out of 5G technologies will help in increasing GDP, creating employment and digitizing the economy. Discuss the statement in the context of India
49. 1. India is the world's largest arms importer and given our economic size and talent pool, this is a matter of concern for us. In this context discuss the importance of indigenisation of defence technology.
50. India may have improved its disease surveillance network, but reducing and limiting disease outbreaks requires several other measures, many lying outside the scope of the healthcare system. Explain