NOVEMBER - 2017

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

PREFACE

With the present shift in examination pattern of UPSC Civil Services Examination, 'General Studies – II and General Studies III' can safely be replaced with 'Current Affairs'. Moreover, following the recent trend of UPSC, almost all the questions are issue-based rather than news-based. Therefore, the right approach to preparation is to prepare issues, rather than just reading news.

Taking this into account, our website www.iasbaba.com will cover current affairs focusing more on 'issues' on a daily basis. This will help you pick up relevant news items of the day from various national dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, LiveMint, Business Line and other important Online sources. Over time, some of these news items will become important issues.

UPSC has the knack of picking such issues and asking general opinion based questions. Answering such questions will require general awareness and an overall understanding of the issue. Therefore, we intend to create the right understanding among aspirants – 'How to cover these issues?

This is the **30**th **edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **November 2017**.

Value add's from IASbaba- Must Read and Connecting the dots.
Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets from November 2017 which shall guide you for better revision.

'Must Read' section, will give you important links to be read from exam perspective. This will make sure that, you don't miss out on any important news/editorials from various newspapers on daily basis.

Under each news article, **'Connecting the dots'** facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue. Basically, it helps you in understanding an issue from multi-dimensional view-point. You will understand its importance while giving Mains or Interview.

Must Read Articles: We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- http://iasbaba.com/babas-daily-news-analysis/

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started"

All the Best ☺

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MAINS FOCUS

NATIONAL

TOPIC
General studies 2:
- *Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary*

Improving the collegium system

In news:
Recently, the Supreme Court's collegium published a resolution promising to hereafter make public, on the court's website, its various decisions, including its verdicts on persons nominated for elevation as judges to the high courts, its choices of candidates for elevation to the Supreme Court, and its decisions on transfer of judges between different high courts. These results will be accompanied by the reasons underpinning the collegium's choices.

Salient move:
The move strikes us as both necessary and important as-
- It will help bring transparency into a system that has been notorious for its opacity.
- The initiative adds a veneer of respectability to a mechanism that lacks any constitutional basis.

Case studies: Lack of transparency
- In the cases of A. Zakir Hussain and Dr. K. Arul, candidates nominated for elevation to the Madras High Court, the collegium has verbatim published the following statement of rejection: "keeping in view the material on record, including the report of Intelligence Bureau [IB] he is not found suitable for elevation to the High Court Bench." The details of what the IB's reports might contain and the apparent materials on record remain concealed.
- The nomination of Vasudevan V.N., a judicial member of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, was not accepted saying "While one of the two consultee-colleagues has offered no views about his suitability, the other colleague has not found him suitable for elevation," the report reads.

Issue:
The collegium, ever since its inception, following the Supreme Court's judgment in what is known as the Second Judges Case (1993) has been enveloped by a sense of confusion.
The present revelations, much opposed to their perceived objective, scarcely make the system more transparent. In Mr. Vasudevan's case, for example, we don't know which of

the "consultee-judges objected to his elevation, and why the judge interviewed found him unsuitable.

These issues concerning the system employed to appoint judges to the Supreme Court and the high courts are of particular salience.

The judiciary was regarded by the Constitution's framers as central to the social revolution that the document was meant to herald. The historian Granville Austin saw the judiciary as critical to "upholding the equality that Indians had longed for during colonial days, but had not gained".

Interpreting consultation:

- To ensure that judges would be insulated from political influence, the assembly agreed on a consultative process of appointing judges, a "middle course," as B.R. Ambedkar described it. T
- The Constitution avoided the cumbersome process of legislative interference and the undemocratic provision of a veto to the Chief Justice, and vested in the President the power to both make appointments and transfer judges between high courts.
- The President, who would act on the advice of the council of ministers, was, however, required to compulsorily consult certain authorities, including the Chief Justice of India (CJI), and, when making appointments to a high court, the chief justice of that court.

Sankalchand Sheth 's case, 1977:

When interpreting the word "consultation," the Supreme Court ruled that the term can never mean "concurrence".

Hence, the CJI's opinion, the court ruled, was not binding on the executive. But nonetheless the executive could depart from his opinion only in exceptional circumstances, and, in such cases, its decision could well be subject to the rigours of judicial review. This seemed like a perfectly sound balance. In 1981, in the First Judges Case, the court once again endorsed this interpretation.

The Second Judges Case:

The court overruled its earlier decisions. It now held that "consultation" really meant "concurrence", and that the CJI's view enjoys primacy, since he is "best equipped to know and assess the worth" of candidates. But, the CJI, in turn, was to formulate his opinion through a body of senior judges that the court described as the collegium.

The Third Judges Case, 1998:

The court clarified its position further. The collegium, it said, will comprise, in the case of appointments to the Supreme Court, the CJI and his four senior-most colleagues — and, in the case of appointments to the high courts, the CJI and his two senior-most colleagues. Additionally, for appointments to the high courts, the collegium must consult such other

senior judges serving in the Supreme Court who had previously served as judges of the high court concerned. The court has been keen to hold on to this power.

NJAC ruling:

When the Constitution was altered, through the 99th constitutional amendment, and when the collegium was sought to be replaced by the National Judicial Appointments Commission — a body comprising members of the judiciary, the executive and the general public — the court swiftly struck it down. It ruled, in what we might now call **the Fourth Judges Case (2015)**, that the primacy of the collegium was a part of the Constitution's basic structure, and this power could not, therefore, be removed even through a constitutional amendment.

Conclusion:

The 2015 judgment also promised to "consider introduction of appropriate measures", to improve the "collegium system". The new resolution is an effort towards this end.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the issues related to collegium system in India and elaborate how a recent resolution by the Supreme court in this regard is a step forward.
- Discuss the evolution of the collegium system in India along with its drawbacks.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.*

Establishing intra-party democracy

In news:

Recently, the Prime Minister Narendra called for a debate on levels of intra-party democracy in different political parties in India. He also stressed that the quality of a democracy ultimately depends on internal democracy (or the lack of it) in political parties.

Importance of intra-party democracy in the success of a democracy:

- In its 170th report in 1999, the Law Commission of India underscored the importance of intra-party democracy by arguing that a political party cannot be a "dictatorship internally and democratic in its functioning outside".
- Intra-party democracy is essential to sustain broader political democracy in a country.

Reasons behind lacking intra-party democracy:

- The opacity of political financing necessitates "unhindered top-down control" and "absolute loyalty down the line".
- The fear of party fragmentation—not uncommon in India; also drives the desire for centralized control.
- By making it mandatory for the legislator to vote along her party line, the anti-defection law has done immense damage to both intra-party democracy and the accountability of a legislator towards her constituency. It also skews the balance of power between the executive and the legislature. The legislator is no longer empowered to act as an effective check on the government of the day.
- Local area development schemes like MPLADS and MLALADS that vest an annual sum with the members of Parliament and legislative assemblies for development work in their constituencies skew the balance in favour of state and Central legislators at the expense of city- and village-level administrators. These schemes unjustly favour the incumbent representative and also exacerbate the problem of patronage politics.
- Patronage politics lies at the heart of dynastic succession in Indian politics—a result of control of political parties by an oligarchic elite. Dynastic succession also works as insurance against defections and fragmentation of political parties.

Issue:

Opacity in political financing, fear of fragmentation and unstable governments, dynastic succession, and lack of intra-party democracy are all mutually reinforcing variables.
Example- In the Indian National Congress, the current leadership of Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi has systematically destroyed the regional leadership of the party.

Way out:

Unlike some countries like Germany and Portugal, India has no legal provision for enforcing internal democracy in a political party. There are some related provisions in the Election Commission guidelines but those are neither adequate nor enforceable. In its 255th report in 2015, the Law Commission had suggested some legislative redressal.
- Doing away with the anti-defection law, especially for those votes where the survival of the government is not at stake.
- Scrapping the MPLADS and MLALADS. Abolishing the MPLADS to finance the state funding of political parties
- A partial state subsidy to fund elections and political parties.

Conclusion:

There are many options. But all of these will require a willingness by the incumbent political authorities to give up some of their powers. They need to step up to the challenge.

Connecting the dots:

- In its 170th report in 1999, the Law Commission of India underscored the importance of intra-party democracy by arguing that a political party cannot be a "dictatorship internally and democratic in its functioning outside". Critically analyze.
- Discuss the reasons behind lack of intra-party democracy in India. Also suggest measures that would help make our politicla parties more democratic.

TOPIC:
General Studies 2
- *History of the world will include events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization, political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc. - their forms and effect on the society.*
- *Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.*

100 years of Communism

Background:

The 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution is to be celebrated this year. A hundred years ago, a group of Communist revolutionaries stormed the Winter Palace in St Petersburg to overthrow the first democratic government in Russian history. The new dawn they promised eventually became a nightmare for the millions of people who lived under Communist regimes. A group of European historians, in a book titled *The Black Book Of Communism*, estimated that 94 million people have been killed by Communist regimes around the world over the years.

Communist ideology:

The Communist ideology is derived, on the one hand, from the penetrating insights of Karl Marx on the contradictions of Victorian capitalism and, on the other, from the violent determination of Leninist regimes to impose their version of utopia on feudal societies.

Failure:
- The few experiments with a more moderate version of Communism—in Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito or during the Prague Spring led by Alexander Dubček—were too insignificant to make a lasting impact.
- The liberal Menshevik regime in Georgia was crushed by an invading Bolshevik army in 1921.
- The spectacular collapse of Communism across Europe as well as the embrace of capitalism by the Chinese Communists destroyed the last remnants of credibility.

Why Communism failed?

- Capitalism in the advanced countries softened its hard edges in response to the Communist challenge.
- The industrial proletariat that Marx hoped would be the driving force of historical transformation lost its political clout in economies where services became more important.
- The innate failure of planning agencies to replace the price system as the primary institution of economic coordination amid rapid technological change ensured that Communist countries lost the race for global dominance.
- Hope of the emergence of a new socialist man driven by political commitment rather than economic incentives such as higher wages or property rights proved to be vacuous.
- The totalitarianism of the international Communist movement snuffed out all fresh thinking, and intellectual movements such as the New Left, Eurocommunism and analytical Marxism were treated as heretical.

Left parties on decline:

Any modern society needs a left to articulate the needs of the poorest. The liberal consensus that has dominated the world since 1990, and which deserves at least some of the credit for the most spectacular decline in poverty in human history, is now being challenged by a resurgent nationalism in the developed countries. The working class in these countries has seen its incomes stagnate as industrial jobs were shipped abroad or lost to automation.

This working class has veered towards nationalist parties rather than the traditional left to articulate its grievances.

Left force in India:

In India, the left no longer has any power or influence. Its opposition to economic reforms, its failure to grapple with the complexities of caste, its restricted base in pockets of labour aristocracy such as bank unions, its readiness to compromise with Muslim communalism in an attempt to oppose Hindu communalism, its loyalty to Stalinist methods—these are just some of the factors that have made it irrelevant.

Conclusion:

Socialism is desirable. But, the problem is that what is true of an intimate group of people need not be true of large populations. The rules of intimate groupings cannot be imposed on the extended order unless one is prepared to use extreme violence. This is the big lesson of 100 years of Communism.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the concept of communism and the reasons behind its failure. Also discuss the concept in the context of present India.

- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*
- *Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc*

Reforming Indian Railways

Background:

IR's 7,000 trains carry three million tonnes of freight daily over an average distance of 620 km, sustaining its agriculture, industry and commerce; another 13,000 passenger trains transport 23 million travellers every day, knitting the country together. Although freight business has been crucial for IR's financial health, it is passenger segment that directly impacts popular perception.

Issues:

- An endemic shortage of supply. IR's seven high-density corridors stretched over 10,500 km remain clogged; its stations and maintenance wherewithal over-stretched; train speeds remain low; and services far less than satisfactory.
- Passengers face hassles of ticketing, irksome access to large stations, unhygienic and unkempt platforms and coaches and unpunctual trains. Worse, unhygienic food cooked in dirty premises and filthy blankets for AC passengers.
- Each passenger train incurs a loss of as much as Rs. 487 (in 2015-16) per km. Resulting into hiking of freight charges and upper class, mostly AC, passenger fares. High freight charges have adversely impacted railway's business. With low cost air carriers looming large, it must refrain from raising AC train fares. The upper class segment aggregates just 145 million journeys in a year, only 1.8 per cent of IR's overall riderships, but contribute more than 31 per cent (Rs. 13,756 crore, in 2015-16) of total passenger earnings.

Challenge:

The number of air passengers, which constituted just about 1 per cent of 'upper' class rail passengers in 1950-51, now exceeds 75 per cent, and is poised to surpass the rail share sooner than 2020. Total rail riderships in 2016-17 was 8,219 million, a mere 0.84 per cent more than in 2015-16. As NHDP's golden quadrilateral network progresses, high-capacity vehicles cover inter-city distances, posing a formidable challenge to IR. Again, in the context of UDAAN riding on the 2016 National Civil Aviation Policy, airlines are weaning away IR's upper class medium and long haul travellers.

Examples:

After undergoing some serious pain, passenger traffic on British Rail has risen since 1995, aided by technological improvements in infrastructure and rolling stock, on-time runs, easier ticketing, friendly tariffs, and enhanced ambience of train travel. Chinese Railways separated passenger and freight businesses, increased service speeds, cut train halts, raised passenger fares, effectively discouraged short-distance passengers, and drastically reduced travel times.

Things to do for Indian railways:
- Time-tabled freight trains running with credible service guarantees.
- Reserved accommodation on passenger trains available on demand.
- Average speed of freight trains to rise to 50 km/h (from less than 24 km/h now) and of Mail/Express trains to 80 km/h (from around 60 km/h).
- Semi-high speed trains running along the golden quadrilateral.
- High-end technology to significantly improve safety.

Way forward:
- IR needs to keep its strategy for passenger business simple, to make a perceptible difference in pre-board facilities (booking and reservation, clean station platforms, uncluttered with parcels, vendors or kiosks) and on-board amenities (clean coaches and toilets, good food, besides trains running on time).
- It appears feasible to reduce travel time on selected routes straightaway by rationalising halts and easing some speed restrictions and saving substantial time by improving track curves and turn-outs.
- Unmanned level crossings can be replaced by overpasses, fencing vulnerable locations, and providing cab signalling, also for automatic train protection. Some trains can run end-to-end with minimum intermediate halts.
- As IR sincerely needs to view itself essentially as a commercial entity, pricing its passenger services rationally, it should run a few additional long-distance trains on some highly under-served popular route(s) for all intending passengers to get confirmed accommodation on demand. It may well mean good economics as much as good politics.
- Another important aspect IR needs to address on priority is to provide additional terminal facilities, including for maintenance of train sets, for major metros.

Connecting the dots:
- Indian railways is facing multiple challenges form other modes of transportation. Discuss why. Also elaborate on much needed reforms which are long pending.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:
- ***Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.***

General Studies 3:
- ***Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.***

Expanding agricultural exports

In news:
The government has expressed its resolve to expand agricultural exports.

Benefits of increase in agri-exports:
- Increase the country's export basket.
- Augment farmers' incomes and ameliorate farm distress.

Export-Import trends:
In general, both agri-exports and imports have increased substantially since 2004-05, reflecting the increasing integration of Indian agriculture with global markets.
- Agri-trade increased from $14 billion to $59.2 billion between 2004-05 and 2016-17.
- As a share of the agri-GDP, the contribution of this trade increased from 11.1 per cent in 2004-05 to 16.7 per cent in 2016-17.
- Agri-exports suffered primarily due to the significant fall in exports of cereals (especially wheat and maize), cotton, oilseeds and, to some extent, bovine meat. This, in turn, was largely due to a steep fall in global prices and restrictive export policies. The FAO food price index fell from 209.8 in 2013 to 161.5 in 2016. Export policies for pulses, oilseeds/edible oils and several vegetables were restrictive.
- Agricultural imports have been rising since 2004-05. Edible oils, pulses, and fruits, nuts, vegetables being the major produce.

How to increase agricultural exports?
A paradigm shift in policy-making from being obsessively consumer-oriented to according greater priority to farmers' interests is required.
- **Identifying agri-commodities** that can help boost the agri-trade surplus. Estimates show that India is export competitive in almost 70 per cent of agricultural commodities, non-tradable (that is our prices are between import parity and export parity prices) in about 10-15 per cent commodities, and import competitive in the remaining 15-20 per cent commodities. On the exports front, India is relatively competitive in cereals, especially rice and wheat and maize, and, at times, oilseeds, especially groundnuts and oil meals. The country can also be competitive in groundnut and mustard oil, provided there is an open and stable export policy. India has also been the world's second largest exporter of cotton.
  The country has a great potential to export fish and seafood, bovine meat, and fruits, nuts and vegetables. These are the commodities to focus on in order to stimulate agri-exports.
- **Building global value-chains** for some important agri-commodities in which the country has a comparative advantage. This would require infrastructure and institutional support — connecting export houses directly to farmer producer organisations (FPOs),

sidestepping the APMC-regulated mandis, removing stocking limits and trading restrictions.

- Bringing in the required **structural reforms in agriculture**. A special package to support value-chains through infrastructural investments (in assaying, grading, packaging and storing facilities), which will also create jobs in rural areas, or assistance in adhering to sanitary and phytosanitary standards would make export-oriented value-chains more resilient towards any price shocks.

- India needs to adopt an **open, stable and reliable export policy**. Abrupt export bans, high minimum export prices to restrict exports, or other quantitative restrictions on pulses, edible oils — even on vegetables and cereals at times — must give way to a policy that does not put any fetters on exports.

- **Liberalisation of factor markets**, especially land-lease markets, would also help in building more efficient and reliable export value-chains. Over-regulated land-lease markets have kept landholdings small and forced informal tenancies to flourish rendering them incapable of mobilising large-scale capital. Long land-lease arrangements can facilitate private investments in building export-oriented global value-chains, generating rural non-farm employment and enhancing farmers' incomes.

Conclusion:

It is time for the government to steer a "farm-to-foreign" strategy, improve agri-trade surpluses by promoting agri-exports. This will most importantly help create more jobs and bring prosperity to rural areas.

Connecting the dots:

- Given the importance of expanded agricultural exports, it is time for the government to steer a "farm-to-foreign" strategy and improve agri-trade surpluses by promoting agri-exports. Discuss.

TOPIC:
General Studies 2
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

General Studies 3:
- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*

Demonetisation and creation of formal jobs

Background:

The unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent in India is not a job problem but a wages problem. This diagnosis is important. And if our problem is wages then India needs the higher productivity that comes from structural change: Formalisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, skilling and deep financial markets.

How demonetisation would help in formal job creation?
Demonetisation made India a better habitat for formal job creation for five reasons:
- Demonetisation has reduced cash with citizens; bank deposits have increased. Demonetisation has created new lending capacity of about Rs 18 lakh crore. This will boost investment and formal job creation.
- Demonetisation exploded the number of digital payments on UPI/Bhim from 1 lakh in October 2016 to 7.7 crore in October 2017. Prohibiting salary payments by cash and 50 lakh new bank accounts for labourers will fuel further adoption; digitisation is important for formalisation because it makes regulatory arbitrage and tax evasion difficult.
- Demonetisation has catalysed a savings shift away from gold (imports are down 20 per cent over the last year) and real estate (the toxic gap between rental yields and borrowing rates is finally narrowing). Greater financialisation of savings creates a virtuous cycle for formal job creation because they deepen and broaden domestic capital markets whose institutions are more likely to fund entrepreneurs who create companies that are small and will grow rather than companies that are small and will stay small.
- Lowering interest rates is a policy priority and banks had been only passing on 50 per cent of lower policy rates to customers; in the year after demonetisation this has risen to 100 per cent. Sustained formal job creation needs the lower interest rates that come from macroeconomic stability, fiscal discipline, muted inflation expectations and an Independent Monetary Policy Committee.
- Demonetisation targeted a less-cash society because cash is the primary tool of corruption. Corruption enables transmission losses between how the law is written, interpreted, practised and enforced while India's move to high productivity enterprises needs moving from deals to rules. Demonetisation did not end corruption but raised its costs.

Conclusion:
Demonetisation is one of the other reforms — GST, bankruptcy code, RERA, FDI liberalisation, ease-of-doing business, competitive federalism, etc — that are making India a fertile habitat for formal, non-farm, job creation.

Connecting the dots:
- Discuss how demonetization would result into creation of more formal jobs.

Solving the issue of high NMR in India

Background:

India has not performed well when it comes to neo-natal mortality rate(NMR). It is measured as death of a newborn within 28 days per 1,000 live births. According to World Bank statistics, we moved from 33 in 2010 to 28 in 2015. As a benchmark, the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for NMR is 12 by 2030. If India continues on this slow trajectory, we will achieve the SDG only by 2040.

Examples shows the problem is not unsolvable: Sri Lanka, has an NMR of 5.4. Closer home, Kerala is already at 6 and Tamil Nadu at 14.

Achieving the target- Way forward:

Achieving the SDG target of 12 for NMR by 2030, or even faster, will require five key interventions—all related to the basic management of public health.

Need for 2-3 emergency C-section points in every district:

Issue:

Usually there exists only one-two operational C-section points in most districts. This implies longer travel times for women in labour, creating distress and overburdening facilities—which in turn cannot provide adequate care, thereby endangering the newborn. While research indicates that the C-section rate in India is now beyond the optimal range (greater than 10–15%), the situation in public institutions is quite the opposite. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the C-section rates in public institutions remain at 4.7% and 2.6%, respectively.

Solution:

To achieve two-three fully operational C-section points on priority, a functional trio of specialists (paediatrician, gynaecologist and anaesthetist) and specialized equipment are needed. 10–20% of facilities have a complete trio but still do not perform procedures due to behavioural and accountability issues. This needs to be addressed.

Quality special newborn care units (SNCUs):

Conditions like asphyxia, prematurity or sepsis require specialized care. Two-three SNCUs should be fully functional per district. This means that three-four beds per 1,000 deliveries need to have critical equipment, including radiant warmers and phototherapy machines. Additionally, the critical nature of the newborns warrants round-the-clock care—a minimum of four nurses.

Addressing key clinical skill gaps:

Issue:

Basic clinical skills can prevent a majority of neonatal deaths. Unfortunately, many clinical staff lack these basic skills, or don't practice them. For example, simple process of placing a pre-term child against the mother's chest keeps the baby warm and facilitates weight gain through breastfeeding. However, this practice (kangaroo mother care) is still not widely practised.

Similarly, clinical staff are shy about practices like neonatal resuscitation that can tackle asphyxia.

Solution:

Several tools, including a "safe birth" checklist, are available. Development agencies (for example Unicef) conduct specialized training programmes for clinical staff. States should mandate such training and the practice of these basic protocols.

Improving care of pregnant women:

While many complications are detected during labour, many can be identified during pregnancy through tests, like those for blood pressure and haemoglobin.

Issue:

Coverage of antenatal visits by front-line workers is alarmingly low: 51% according to the National Family Health Survey, 2015-16.

Additionally, the quality of nurse and pregnant women interactions is often poor. Simple diagnostic procedures are not conducted, resulting in dismal rates of high-risk pregnancy identification.

Solution:

Availability of basic diagnostic equipment, an expansion of front-line worker capacity (using methods like supportive supervision) and their increased accountability towards coverage and quality of antenatal visits are key.

Data tracking and accountability:

Issue:

Currently, management information systems are only able to track around 20-40% of actual deaths. This is because staff are rarely held accountable for the data. Complex and multiple registers are also to blame.

Solution:

Field data collection processes need to be simplified. Wherever possible, technology like mobile apps should be used.

Systemized data-driven reviews of key NMR-related measures, including still-birth rates, are necessary. Data tracking would enable success.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that it is not cutting-edge science that will save lives. Simple fixes, many of them administrative and managerial, don't get addressed. In order to make the foundations of our health system robust we first need to implement the simple solutions.

Connecting the dots:

- India has not performed well when it comes to neo-natal mortality rate(NMR). If India continues on the same trajectory, we will achieve the SDG related to NMR only by 2040. Discuss the measures if taken would help to solve the issue.
- Our health system lacks robustness because simple fixes, many of them administrative and managerial, don't get addressed. Discuss.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:

- ***Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment***

Air pollution in Delhi: GRAP

In news:

Delhi has declared a public emergency, on account of poor air quality. The city registered "severe" on the Air Quality Index (AQI). "Everyone may experience serious health effects", notes the AQI website.

What is AQI?

An **air quality index** (AQI) is a number used by government agencies to communicate to the public how polluted the **air** currently is or how polluted it is forecast to become. As the AQI increases, an increasingly large percentage of the population is likely to experience increasingly severe adverse health effects.

There are six AQI categories:

AQI	Associated Health Impacts
Good (0–50)	Minimal Impact
Satisfactory (51–100)	May cause minor breathing discomfort to sensitive people.
Moderately	May cause breathing discomfort to people with lung disease such as asthma, and

polluted (101–200)	discomfort to people with heart disease, children and older adults.
Poor (201–300)	May cause breathing discomfort to people on prolonged exposure, and discomfort to people with heart disease
Very Poor (301–400)	May cause respiratory illness to the people on prolonged exposure. Effect may be more pronounced in people with lung and heart diseases.
Severe (401-500)	May cause respiratory impact even on healthy people, and serious health impacts on people with lung/heart disease. The health impacts may be experienced even during light physical activity.

Issue:

- Air pollution causes cancer, lung disease and heart attacks. It is a public health risk that lowers the quality of life and productivity.
- What must be also taken into account is that sustained poor quality of the air one has to breathe is a sharply negative factor, for drawing in investment. Investor would not want to set up shop in a place where people are guaranteed to turn sickly and only the desperate would take up jobs.

Reasons behind:

- Badly maintained vehicles on badly planned and congested roads, irresponsible burning of trash by citizens and construction dust account for a large part of the problem.
- In Delhi, the burning of crop stubble in distant Punjab fields is a source of Particulate Matter 2.5, as the wind drives the smoke into the capital region.
- Unstable power grids in and around Delhi force people to depend on diesel generators for extended hours of electricity supply.
- The crop stubble burning in neighbouring states have compounded to the problem with experts suggesting that if wind speed did not pick up in next few days, the city could witness a situation similar to last year when AQI crossed dangerous 500 level.

What is EPCA?

Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA) is a SC-mandated body that has over a dozen members. It was notified in 1998 by the Union Environment Ministry under the Environment Protection Act.

What is graded response action plan (GRAP)?

The plan was prepared by the Supreme Court-mandated Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA), which held meetings with stakeholders from all states over several months. A graded response lays down stratified actions that are required to be taken as and when the concentration of pollutants reaches a certain level.

This plan will be putting into action a number of anti-pollution measures and there will be specific actions for each category — moderate to poor, very poor, severe and emergency. The measures include stoppage in the running of diesel sets, a three-fourfold increase in the parking rates, enhanced bus and metro services, and newspapers, TV and radio stations alerts on a daily basis with advice to people with respiratory and cardiac problems.

Also, air in moderate-to-poor category will involve periodical mechanised sweeping of roads, deployment of traffic police for smooth flow of traffic at identified choke areas and strict enforcement of pollution norms at brick kilns and industrial complexes.

Recommendations of EPCA:

- It has asked the Delhi government to put more emergency measures in place.
- It has suggested that parking fees be quadrupled.
- It also asked Delhi Metro to lower fares during non-peak hours for at least 10 days and introduce more coaches.

Government's apathy:

- Serious problem pertains to the passive attitude of the Delhi government. In the past two years, it has waited for pollution to assume emergency proportions before reacting, and then done nothing more than respond to courts or court-mandated bodies like the EPCA.
- The Delhi government implemented the odd-even policy last year only after the Delhi High Court asked it to submit a time-bound plan. Despite the problems it created for people, there was enough support for the policy which demanded the Delhi government conduct a comprehensive analysis of its successes and failures. But it has, reportedly, developed cold feet over the odd-even policy.
- The EPCA's proposals will require at least 16 authorities to work together. The EPCA and the Delhi government have not devised a coordination mechanism between these bodies.

Way forward:

- Power plants must use beneficiated coal and deploy catalytic converters to reduce and trap particulate matter.
- Citizens must be educated as to the dangers of pollution and learn to cooperate, whether on fire crackers or burning trash.
- The GARP needs to be taken seriously. Proactive rather than reactive measures are the need of the hour.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by Graded response action plan(GRAP)? Discuss the effectiveness of such plans in solving the issue of air pollution in cities like Delhi.

Building Climate-Smart Cities

Introduction:

According to UN-Habitat's estimates, over 64 per cent of the world population is expected to reside in cities by 2050.

Cities consume enormous resources. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that urban infrastructure accounts for two-third of the global energy use and 70 per cent of energy related Green House Gas (GHG) emissions. By 2025 megacities of 10 million or more people will house more than half the world's population and contribute more than half of global GDP.

Indian context:

As India's urban population grows from 410 million in 2014 to 814 million in 2050, with about 7 cities having more than 10 million people, there will be rise in energy consumption, degradation of forest areas and agricultural land and disturbed ecosystems, problems of water supply and solid waste management.

This will be accentuated by growing risks of climate vulnerability (frequent floods, cyclones, extreme temperature and heat waves) disrupting city lives and affecting the poor who typically lack adequate resources and safeguards to fight such stresses.

Lot to lose:

The scale of such damages enormous-

- The 2011 Bangkok flood caused damages of $45 billion to the global supply chain of which only 10 billion was insured.
- Swiss Re, a reinsurer estimated that of the $50 billion or so losses to floods, cyclones and other disasters in Asia in 2014, only 8 per cent were covered.

This provides an opportunity for cities to lead the world towards a sustainable future by becoming resilient and climate-smart and, 'leap-frogging' the inefficient and resource-intensive systems of the past.

Climate-smart transformation:

It needs set of city-specific strategies to systematically reduce city's carbon footprint and enhance resilience to climate change through smart, affordable and, resilient infrastructure, and mixed form of adaptable land-use. Cities can use 'predictive models' to assess the potential risks of climate vulnerabilities (erratic rainfalls, flood, high temperature) and, monetise those risks to account for additional financial and social costs for building safeguards.

Decoupling city's economic growth from the growth of GHG emissions:

Each city should have a clearly defined 'low carbon pathway', a series of interventions like

- Integrated solid waste management (ISWM).
- Energy efficient energy/ water supply.
- Harnessing rooftop solar and battery storage.
- Green urban mobility (including electric mobility, public and, non-motorised transport).
- Green and affordable building infrastructure.
- Smart grids.

Financing climate-smart cities:

Needs innovative solutions. The ability of cities to finance urban infrastructure largely depends on their budgets, revenue sources and creditworthiness.

Issue:

The perceived lack of creditworthiness (among 500 largest emerging market cities, only 4 per cent are creditworthy) for most cities in India becomes a critical barrier to secure affordable financing on international market or issue bonds to fund climate projects.

Way out:

- Credit enhancement facilities such as, Guarantee Fund can help cities to overcome such barrier and raise funds by issuing bonds, etc.
- An effective way to catalyse private investment in urban projects is to mobilise credits through local financial institutions (LFIs). These are better positioned to assess and manage the risks inherent to the local authorities and, mobilise medium and, long-term financing in local currencies, thus eliminating the forex risk.
- To attract investments, cities should develop a pipeline of 'bankable' projects that meet broad feasibility parameters. Project preparation is expensive, typically accounts for 5-10 per cent of the project cost, and, most cities lack capacity for conducting feasibility, design and, financial structuring of the projects. Development partners and multilateral banks, equipped with global best-practices, can step in to support cities in setting project selection criteria to favour climate-smart infrastructure, laying right indicators for monitoring sustainability, and building technical and financial capacity of city officials to mainstream climate goals in planning, designing, operations and maintenance of the city.

Conclusion:

Transformative change is needed in how we build our cities, transport people and goods, and manage our landscapes. The need is urgent; the time-frame for making the choice is critical due to lock-in effect of capital and technology. The challenge is not simply to increase the volume of funding in the pipeline, but also to create an enabling environment to catalyse new finance flow from a broad spectrum of investors — public or private.

Connecting the dots:

- Transforming cities into climate-smart ones is the need of the hour. Discuss. Also elaborate on ways Indian states can be made so.

TOPIC
General Studies 2:
- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*
General Studies 1:
- *Social empowerment*
- *Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues*

Focusing on improving nutrition

Background:

Many people are not eating the right food.

- For some, it's simply a decision to stick with food they enjoy, but which isn't too healthy. This is leading to an increase in non-communicable diseases. This in turn leads to major burdens on our health-care systems that have the potential to derail the economic progress that is essential for the poor to improve their lives.
- For others, it's about limited access to nutritious foods or a lack of affordability, leading to monotonous diets that do not provide the daily nutrients for them to develop fully.
- Diets are changing, but not always for the better.

Part of the reason nutrition is under threat worldwide is that our food systems are not properly responding to nutritional needs. In other words, somewhere along that long road from farm to fork, the movement is not smooth.

Global efforts:

There is now a major international effort to improve global food systems and link those improvements to better nutrition and diets. Last year, in Rome, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) and the World Health Organisation convened an International Symposium on Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition. It was a follow-up to the Second International Conference on Nutrition in 2014. These conferences are placing nutrition at the centre of the debate on improving our food

systems because while improving nutrition is a personal responsibility, it also depends on how policies are framed.

Way out:
- The vast majority of the food we eat is produced by smallholder farmers, many of whom are poor and undernourished themselves. Improvements to food systems must be achieved in ways that benefit their livelihood and nutritional needs. The Sustainable Development Goals have a target that recognises that smallholders provide a critical entry point for building dynamic rural economies and they need to be resourced with inputs and technology and linked to higher market value.
- Bringing together the key players in the food system- the people who grow our food, and the people who transport it, process it, market it and sell it-for policy making. This would facilitate informed decision.

Conclusion:
We must place nutrition at the centre of the debate on improving our food systems. We must all work together to equip our food systems to produce and deliver more nutritious food. Only then can the goal of achieving zero hunger be realised.

Connecting the dots:
- There exists a serious disconnect between farm to folk resulting into poor nutritional status of most of the Indians. Analyze.

TOPIC
General Studies 1:
- *Poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies*
General Studies 2:
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
General Studies 3:
- *Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment*

Adopting landscape approach while tackling climate change

Background:
In 2015, India made a Bonn Challenge commitment to place into restoration 13 million hectares (Mha) of degraded land by 2020 and an additional 8 Mha by 2030. India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) have also pledged to sequester 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO_2 equivalent additionally by 2030 through enhanced tree cover.

Initial government estimates suggest that to achieve this, India will need to extend tree cover on at least 28-34 million hectares, outside of the existing forest cover.

An over-reliance on plantations:
As different States work to achieve the commitments, it appears that there is an over-reliance on plantations.

In July this year, Madhya Pradesh planted 66 million trees in 12 hours to enter the record books, overtaking Uttar Pradesh's record of planting 49.3 million trees in a day, in 2016. Other States are also expected to follow suit. Neither the Bonn Challenge nor the NDCs are about large-scale plantations alone.

Adopting landscape approach:
The Bonn Challenge lays emphasis on **landscape approaches** — a model aimed at improving the ecology of a landscape as a whole in order to benefit local livelihoods and conserve biodiversity.

The NDC lays emphasis not only on carbon sequestration but also adaptation to climate change through a strengthened flow of benefits to local communities that are dependent on forests and agriculture for sustenance. India's policy framework on forests also lays emphasis on a landscape approach to manage forest and tree cover, so that the flow of multiple ecosystem services — including food security, climate mitigation and adaptation, conservation of biological diversity and water supplies — is secured.

Issues arising due to over-reliance on plantations: Large-scale plantation drives do not lay stress on-

- Species selection.
- The quality of planting materials or survival rates.
- Does not recognise tenure and resource rights to ensure that the benefit flows to communities.

Operationalising a landscape approach: We must protect healthy forest areas from deforestation, degradation and fragmentation. We must also creatively integrate trees into different land uses. India has numerous models that are suited for different regions and farm household sizes to draw upon, and must not rely on plantation drives alone to secure environmental and developmental outcomes. In India at least 35 types of agroforestry models are practiced. These combine different trees that provide timber, fruits, fodder, fuel and fertilizers with food crops. It diversifies income from farming, and improves land productivity.

Engaging farmers in natural regeneration: Systems where farmers protect and manage the growth of trees and shrubs that regenerate naturally in their fields from root stock or from seeds dispersed through animal manure can deliver several economic and ecosystem

benefits.

Global example: In Niger, West Africa, farmers operating on 5 Mha of land added roughly 200 million on-farm trees in the past 30 years. This has sequestered 25-30 million tonnes of carbon and increased annual agricultural production by about 500,000 tonnes.

In India:

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development's (NABARD's) **'Wadi' model** is a good example of tree-based interventions which is proving to have great value in terms of cost-effectiveness as well as the range of benefits they deliver to communities.

'Wadi' project:

It is a livelihood project launced by NABARD in Jhansi and Lalitpur districts of Uttar Pradesh. It aims at reducing the migration of tribal people to urban centres by providing them livelihood in the form of income and basic necessities like fuel wood, timber and cattle fodder. The programme will assist tribal families by giving assistance to develop orchards and   related   activities.

It is actually a tree-based farming system that consists of fruit tree suitable to the area or a combination of trees with forestry species. Two or more tree crops are selected in Wadi model to minimise biological and marketing risks. In five years, a poor village of 100 families can get converted into an orchard of a 100-150 acre producing hundreds of tonnes of fruits.

Way forward:

*   Participatory approach- As we regenerate trees through different interventions, it is critical to ensure that owners have the right to manage and use these trees.

*   Determining the best method of landscape restoration- It is also critical to use scientific evidence-based methodology with a participatory approach to determine the right type of tree-based interventions most suitable to a certain land use. This can be done by rigorous analysis of spatial, legal and socio-economic data and draws on consultations with key stakeholders to determine the right type of interventions.

*   A performance monitoring system to quantify tree survival rates and the benefits to communities should be established. This can be achieved through a combination of remote sensing, crowd sourced, ground-level monitoring with support from communities and civil society organisations.

*   An important success factor in large-scale tree-based programmes is security of tenure and land rights. In several parts of the world, securing tenure over forests has been established as a cost-effective way of achieving climate sequestration. Considering this the land and tenancy legislation in the country needs to be reviewed.

Conclusion:

India has the policy framework, the political will and financing to endorse landscape restoration. What we really need now is innovation and imagination to build replicable and scalable models with a participatory approach to achieve the country's climate goals through landscape restoration.

Connecting the dots:

- India needs to adopt a participatory and a landscape approach when it comes to handling climate change through extending tree or forest cover. Discuss.

TOPIC:
General Studies 2
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections*
- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*

Conflict between the Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication and Public Distribution System

Case study:
In October 2017, the death of an 11-year-old Dalit child, Santoshi Kumari, of Jharkhand, was widely reported. She had been pleading with her mother to give her rice as she slipped into unconsciousness and lost her life. The government insists that she had malaria but in video testimonies, her mother, Koyli Devi, says she had no fever. According to the State Food Minister, their ration card was cancelled in July because they failed to seed it with Aadhaar.

Target:
For months, the Central government has been insisting on 100% Aadhaar "seeding" across schemes such as the PDS, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and pensions.

What is seeding and why is it required?
Seeding refers to the practice of entering Aadhaar numbers for each household member on the ration card.
It is a pre-requisite for the Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication (ABBA) system, the practice of using an electronic point of sale (PoS) machine to authenticate each transaction. The government has made seeding and the ABBA mandatory in the PDS.

Seeding: An important barrier
Issue:
The seeding has been made mandatory resulting into various issues.

In their zeal to achieve 100% Aadhaar-seeding targets, some field functionaries just deleted the names of those who did not submit Aadhaar details. Others waited till the deadline and then struck off names. The government claims that all of these were "fake", detected due to Aadhaar, thus saving crores of rupees.

Lack of awareness:

Some people blame the aggrieved for failing to seed Aadhaar. But many of them are unaware of the seeding requirement.

When pensions in Jharkhand suddenly stopped for many pensioners, they had no idea why. No one had told them about Aadhaar. In some cases, the middlemen had seeded it wrongly. Others still had tried repeatedly and failed.

High biometric failure rates:

The Finance Ministry's latest Economic Survey, based on micro-studies, reports high biometric failure rates.

- In Rajasthan, government data for the past year show that around 70% of cardholders are able to use the system successfully. The rest have either been tripped up by one of the ABBA hurdles or, less likely, they did not attempt to buy PDS grain.
- In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana it is used to disburse MGNREGA wages and pensions: biometric failure rates are between 8 and 14%. In some months, one in four pensioners returns empty-handed.
- Many families could not collect rations because of a biometric mismatch at the PDS shop.

ABBA and corruption:

The ABBA has not much role in reducing corruption.

- Quantity fraud is the practice of cheating on quantities sold. Neither seeding nor the ABBA can stop quantity fraud. In a survey in Jharkhand, dealers continue to swindle people by cutting up to a kg of their grain entitlement despite successful ABBA authentication.
- Identity fraud, for example in the form of duplicate ration cards, only requires Aadhaar-seeding; the ABBA is unnecessary. Two issues related to seeding are: it can be foolproof against identity fraud only in a universal system. More seriously, it raises privacy issues.

Further, in Aadhaar's rulebook for example, an elderly person asking a neighbour to fetch their grain would count as identity fraud. In fact, it is flexibility that is lost when the ABBA is made mandatory.

Five meaningless hurdles:

Thus, each month, people are being forced to cross five meaningless hurdles in order to have access to their ration. The hurdles are:

- Power supply.

- Functional PoS machine.
- Connectivity, State and Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR) servers.
- Fingerprint authentication.

Failing any one hurdle even once causes anxiety in subsequent months. The resultant anxiety defeats the very purpose of such forms of social support. Failure in consecutive months leads to people giving up entirely. They stop trying.

Way forward:

The ABBA should be withdrawn immediately from the PDS and pensions in favor of alternative technologies such as smart cards. This will allow us to take the advantage of offline PoS machines with smart card and get rid of the issues associated with Internet dependence and biometric authentication. Insisting on the ABBA will result into failure of PDS, which is a lifeline for the poor.

Connecting the dots:

- Insisting on Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication (ABBA) will result into failure of PDS, which is a lifeline for the poor. Critically analyze.

NATIONAL

TOPIC
General Studies 3:

- ***Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment***

Tackling Pollution: Strengthening coordination among states

Background:

The air quality index for Delhi is in the region of 470-500, whereas anything greater than 300 is considered 'hazardous' and a reading below 50 considered 'good. As temperatures dip during winters, pollutants hover around the surface of the city and do not waft upwards. Smoke from burning farm waste descends on the capital from surrounding states at this time.

Government's failure to tackle the issue of straw burning:

The Punjab government has not been able to abide by the National Green Tribunal's order to implement a ban on burning paddy straw — nearly 20 million tonnes of it. The farmers are not at fault — they need to clear the land in quick time to prepare for the wheat crop, whereas the combine harvesters leave too tall a stubble of paddy straw for it to be manually removed, both expediently and cheaply. The technological solution — 'the super straw

management system' which, when attached to a mechanical harvester, shreds the waste to small bits so that it need not be burnt and can instead be put to better uses such as biomass and ethanol and electricity production — has not worked out because of subsidy issues between the Centre and the States.

Pollution and federalism: Every state blames the other resulting into weak policy response. This is an indication of an institutional vacuum to deal with public goods issues in a federal political system. The intervention should focus on the root of the problem—stubble burning, in this case. The distortion should be dealt with directly. We need to change the incentives for farmers who burn biomass. In the case of the smog in north India, it could mean that farmers should be paid to invest in better technologies to deal with the stubble left over from the previous harvest. A subsidy will change their incentives. The more practical solution is that the state governments of Delhi, Punjab and Haryana be considered the representative agencies for their respective citizens. They should negotiate on how the cost of changing farming practices will be shared. A first step will be to estimate the amount to be paid for every hectare of farmland that is shifted away from stubble burning.

Global example: The New York City Watershed Agreement of 1997. New York had been asked by government regulators to build an expensive water filtration plant to improve the quality of water it supplied citizens. To reduce costs, the city negotiated with upstream farmers who were polluting the watershed area to either buy out their land or pay them to change farming methods.

Challenge:

The lack of an institutional structure to deal with such federal negotiations, especially when the three state governments are run by three different political parties.

Way out:

This is where the Union government needs to step in as a coordinating agency. It can also offer to bear half the fiscal costs of any green bargain between the three states. A better solution over the long term is to set up a federal agency like the Environmental Protection Agency in the US, with powers to get states to the bargaining table. The exact contours of such an agency will need to be debated by climate change scientists, economists, environmental activists and political parties. The current institutional vacuum needs to be filled.

Tackling vehicular pollution:

Buses, which can run both long distances in cities, as well as provide last-mile connectivity to and from metros and local railway stations. Reserved bus lanes are the most cost-efficient and egalitarian means of city transport, which penalise the polluters — cars and two-wheelers — and carry commuters comfortably and cleanly.

Restricting the number of vehicles:

The pollution caused by private vehicles, whether they are four- or two-wheelers, can be curbed by restricting their numbers, as Beijing and other Chinese cities have done successfully even as public transport is greatly increased.

Global examples:

Shanghai, for instance, has emulated Singapore's example of setting a limit on the number of cars permitted on its roads. Singapore allows market forces to decide the price of such a license, which can exceed the cost of a car sometimes. Parking fees ought to be drastically increased, and payable even at night time. And, following London's example, the proceeds should be ploughed back into bettering the bus service.

Strengthening public transport:

The solution for large cities is to ramp up public transport (Delhi's bus fleet has actually been falling, and it needs land for bus depots) and encourage a shift away from cheap industrial fuel to solar, clean thermal power and natural gas. But the fight for better air quality cannot be successful without citizens exercising lifestyle choices to that end.

Focusing on other cities too:

North India continued to fare among the worst on the globe, with Gwalior second, Allahabad third, Patna sixth and Raipur seventh. While Delhi continues to get all the attention on this score, one should pay heed to children and senior citizens in these other beleaguered cities. These residents can't afford air purifiers like many of the capital's well-to-do and diplomats.

Conclusion:

The winter smog that chokes millions of people every year needs to be dealt with through a long-term institutional strategy rather than hasty administrative responses each time pollution level goes very high.

Connecting the dots:

- The lack of an institutional structure to deal with federal negotiations, especially when the three state governments are run by three different political parties is a major challenge while dealing with air pollution in northern India. Discuss.

Also read: https://iasbaba.com/2017/11/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-8th-nov-2017/
Air Pollution in Delhi: GRAP

TOPIC
General studies 2:
- *Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary*

The institution of judiciary facing crisis of credibility: A conflict between Supreme Court judges

In news:

The Supreme Court of India is facing its worst crisis of credibility since the Emergency.

What happened?

An order was passed by Justice J Chelameswar to constitute a five-judge bench in a petition filed by CJAR. The conflict is over a plea by the Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms that has sought the setting up of a SIT to probe the role of Orissa High Court judge Ishrat Masroor Quddusi in enabling private medical colleges to admit students to MBBS courses despite the Supreme Court barring the institutes from doing so. Quddusi, an Orissa High Court judge between 2004 and 2010, has been accused by the CBI of legally guiding the private medical colleges and assuring them of favourable settlement of their cases in the Supreme Court. Justice J Chelameswar constituted a bench and had heard the matter despite orders from the Chief Justice of India (CJI) that his bench cannot hear the matter. He said judges cannot assign matters to themselves.

Issues:

- Can the chief justice be part of the hearing, since the scandal allegedly criminalises a judgment the CJI himself wrote? - As done by the Chief Justice. By setting himself up as a judge in his own cause and setting up a bench whose composition looks arbitrary, he has undermined the authority of the judiciary.

- Could a constitution bench be constituted bypassing the chief justice in violation of the current procedure through which such benches are constituted? Justice Chelameswar's order setting up a five-judge bench also made the judiciary vulnerable. Surely, there were better ways of securing the removal of the chief justice from the case and setting up a bench in a way that did not depart from existing court procedure or humiliate the chief justice.
A robust judicial consensus would have been built rather than judges projecting their own individual heroism.

An analysis:

- It is the CJI's prerogative, and his alone, to constitute a bench and to direct that a particular matter be heard by that or any other bench. The argument that Justice Chelameswar did so in order to prevent a conflict of interest is undermined by the ill-judged manner in which Justice Chelameswar sought to make his point.

- The distrust amongst judges, as evident in the ways benches are being constituted, seems extraordinarily high.

- Many have defended Justice Chelameswar's move by invoking Article 142 that gives judges the power to do whatever it takes to secure justice. But the use of Article 142 has

also become a sign of immense judicial indiscipline, where judges can overlook procedures.

Other instances denting the authority of the Supreme Court:
- The quality of the court's reasoning.
- The abdication of its constitutional role in some cases.
- Judicial overreach in some instances.
- Corruption within the judiciary- There are issues of corruption in the courts. The judiciary has failed to find a mechanism to deal with allegations of corruption within its ranks. Every justice in the court needs to be above suspicion.

Challenges:
- Caution needs to be taken so that the anti-corruption measures taken do not undermine the independence of the judiciary. It has to be done in a way that does not make the judiciary vulnerable to implicit blackmail and leads to undermining its independence. Reforms that undermine independence in the name of accountability has to be avoided.
- At stake, now, is the reputation and credibility of an institution that has earned itself the title of India's most trusted, a protector of citizens' freedoms, an upholder of the constitutional poise. What is more, this public display of divisions within comes at a time when the court appears at its most vulnerable without. In the last three years or so, the independence of the judiciary has often seemed besieged in the face of a strong political executive that has sought to use the electoral mandate to subdue dissent and circumscribe other institutions, including in the crucial matter of the appointment of judges.
- The court's loss of external credibility combined with internal anarchy does not bode well for Indian democracy. The court has itself become a reflection of the worst rot afflicting Indian institutions. The institutional crisis that the Supreme Court has now created will create the conditions under which it will be easier to legitimise diluting judicial independence.

Way forward:
At the CJI's door lie two key questions: How to address potential conflict of interest issues and how to assert the primacy of his position in a manner that strengthens rather than divides the institution. Between a chief justice who does not recognise conflict of interest, and justices who think the only recourse is public grandstanding, the judiciary will not be able to survive.

Conclusion:
Judicial corruption is an important issue but the judiciary cannot address it by turning on itself. If its senior-most judges give the impression of using a case to settle issues with each other, the institution will only be prone to be attacked by the executive. Most of all, it will

be failing in its duty to live up to the trust and faith that the people of India have come to vest in it.

Connecting the duties:

- A conflict emerged amongst the senior-most judges of the Supreme Court. Discuss the issues associated with the conflict and how such instances hurt the credibility of the highest judiciary.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:

- *Infrastructure: Energy*
- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*

Power Sector reforms: Rationalizing coal cess

Background:
India is a power-starved country. With annual per capita consumption of about 1,100Kwh, India lags behind most of the other developing countries. In countries such as Iran and South Africa, this exceeds 2,500 and 4,000, respectively. The global average stands at around 2,500. There is sizeable power capacity in the country, yet there are large pockets of unmet power demand. Systemic and regulatory shortcomings have been responsible for this irony.

Supply side issues:
The average PLF (plant load factor) for coal-based power plants, which constitute about 60% of India's total power generation capacity, continues to languish below 60%.
What is PLF? It is a measure of the output of a power plant compared to the maximum output it could produce. A lower PLF indicates inefficiency in production and distribution and low-capacity utilization.
Issue arising because of low PLF:
Low-capacity utilization is causing extreme financial strain on the entire power value chain—right from the lenders to the power distribution companies, to the power users.
Way forward:
India's power generation can grow comfortably at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of more than 12% over the next five years—subject to demand.

- Improved utilization of existing power capacities.
- A healthy pipeline of new capacities.

Demand side issues:

- Poor availability at the consumer end.

- Low affordability.

Way forward:

Strengthening Discoms' power affordability can be a powerful way to enhance power consumption.

Rationalising coal cess:

Issue:

The total taxes on thermal coal work out to more than 65%, on an average, over Coal India's basic price.

The GST compensatory cess (that has replaced the clean environment cess that existed before the GST roll-out) is about 40% of the average coal price. Total tax on the common grades of coal is more than 80%, which is higher than taxes on even alcohol, cigarette or luxury cars.

Although optically these taxes and cess are applicable on coal miners and, hence, on power generators, ultimately, they are borne by end consumers across socio-economic segments, despite power being a basic necessity. Such a high rate is unfair, futile and self-defeating, given that coal usage cannot be stopped for the 195 gigawatts (GW) coal-based power capacity (plus the 50 GW in the pipeline) in India. The GST compensatory cess has been put in place after the implementation of GST to compensate state governments for the potential revenue shortfall from GST. This cess may seem like a good way to smoothen the issues in GST implementation. However, burdening an important sector like coal and power that is already suffering from many issues with such a steep tax seems unjustifiable.

Way forward:

Taxes on this part of power's value chain need urgent rationalization.

- Removing the GST compensatory cess on coal can curb the cost of power. The tax revenue—about Rs 22,000 crore—that the Central government would forgo if this were to happen would effectively be transferred, in the shape of lower power cost, to discoms and thus to the state governments. So, the country's total fiscal deficit math wouldn't change much.
- The thrust on shutting down older, inefficient and highly polluting power plants should be intensified.

Conclusion:

Redressal of the flaw in our taxation system can be a game changer not just for the power sector, but for the entire economy, through the multiplier effect that it will result into. Reforming power sector can drive improvements in the standard of life for a large proportion of Indians and aid small and medium enterprises.

Connecting the dots:

- Apart from demand and supply side issues in power sector, an unreasonable coal cess is hurting the sector and overall Indian economy. Critically analyze.

<u>TOPIC</u>
General Studies 3:
- *Indian economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*
- *Disaster and disaster management.*

Managing urban floods: Revamping hydrological cycle

Issue:
- The ongoing torrential rain in Chennai has once again triggered intense debates on how to prevent a repeat of 2015 Chennai flood disaster.
- Massive flooding and water logging within a span of few days of torrential rains has become almost a recurring phenomenon.
- Sadly, the great flood in Chennai in 2015, which left many dead and families impoverished, has not resulted into a policy course correction.

Prime reason for the threat of a massive devastation:
- Chennai's location - located along the highly volatile coast of Bay of Bengal, where heavy rains and cyclonic storms are common phenomenon.
- Global warming.
- Unplanned urban development and poor drainage systems.
- Uncontrolled growth with no hydrological plan.

Role of waterbodies in absorbing excess water:

Generally, when there is heavy rain, the natural lakes, ponds, tanks, rivers and inter-linked drainage systems helps replenish the groundwater, hold back some water and release the excess to the ocean.

According to Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) report, Chennai had more than 600 small water bodies in 1980s, which acted as a natural flood discharge channel and drained the spillover.

But currently, only a fraction of them could be found healthy as most of them are encroached upon to make way for concrete structures.
For instance,
- Chennai's airport is built entirely on the floodplains of Adyar river. The encroachment has resulted in the gradual reduction in the size of some major rivers and lakes.
- Marshlands over the years have become the largest dumping site for solid waste.

In such a case, where open spaces and drainage courses have become the centre of human habitation, the rain water runoff settles on the roads causing extensive flood.

The problems exist at pan-India level:

The threat of a flooding and encroachments on ecologically sensitive wetlands is not happening in Chennai alone. Recent floods in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Guwahati, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Surat shows that most urban centres of India fail to manage their drainage channels.

The Standing Committee on Water Resources (2012-13) on "Repair, Renovation and Restoration of Water Bodies", in its 16th report underlined that most of the water bodies in the country were encroached upon by municipalities and panchayats.

Way forward:

Natural disasters cannot be prevented, but better planning ican help mitigate the hazardous effects of such disasters.

A constructive urban planning with proper drainage system is the need of the hour.
* Governments should take stringent action against encroachments on natural reservoirs, which is reducing water storage capacity.
* A new legislation can be enacted to make encroachments on water bodies a cognizable offense.
* The community can be involved to monitor the health of the tanks and lakes so that encroachers can be kept out.
* The key to resolving both the issues of water shortage and flooding lies in repairing, restoration and renovation of small water bodies which have been largely encroached.
* It is imperative to impose a blanket ban on all construction works in the marshlands.
* Desilting of small water bodies and drainages should be undertaken in regular intervals.
* Parks must have ponds and large development areas must have at least a two-acre retention area which will in turn recharge the aquifers.
* Poor waste management leads to blocking of drains, canals and lakes and the ill-planned road projects are cutting off flood flows. These have to be addressed.

Conclusion:

The initiatives listed above need to be undertaken on priority basis. Or else the flood related problems will become a recurring phenomenon. Absence of proper drainage, and encroachment of marshlands and water bodies are choking the Indian cities. This should stop.

Connecting the dots:
* Absence of proper drainage, and encroachment of marshlands and water bodies are choking the Indian cities resulting into repeated floods in cities like Chennai. Elaborate

how revamping the water bodies and drainage cycle will help solve the issue and what needs to be done in this regard.

Tackling Inequality through Gender and Region-based Reservations

Introduction:

A report released by Credit Suisse revealed that the richest 1% Indians owned 53% of the country's wealth, while the share of the top 10% was 76.30%. In other words, 90% of India owns less than a quarter of the country's wealth.

The main theme of World Bank Group (WBG) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Annual Meet 2017 which took place in Washington, DC during October month focused on tackling inequality.

IMF 2017 Annual Meet Main Theme: *"Fiscal Monitor, Tackling Inequality"*
- The *Fiscal Monitor* observed that inclusive growth is receiving attention because of rising inequalities and slowing economic growth.
- *Tackling Inequality* is important as excessive inequality can erode "social cohesion, lead to political polarization, and ultimately lower economic growth".

IMF *Fiscal Monitor* also observed that inequality of opportunity is higher in emerging countries and recommended that effective public policy, especially on education, can help address this inequality which can lead to enhancing human capital and productivity.

India's position:

India is characterised by high inequality – due to diversity in income, language, religion, culture and social status.
- Nearly one third of youth (especially of under-privileged classes) are unemployed and are not engaged in training or learning institutions.
- The literacy rate in India remains lower than most emerging economies. Inequality in access to education is large.
- In 2015, nearly 60 per cent of employers had reported difficulties in recruitment because of talent shortages and nearly half of our skilled youth are unemployable.

- There is also a need to do more to integrate North-East with the rest of India. In the North-Eastern States, unemployment, and poverty rates are generally higher than that of All-India.
- These unemployed youth are most vulnerable to drug abuse, as in Punjab, and other anti-social activities within the country.
- Illustratively, the incidence of stone pelting in Kashmir for payment of Rs. 500 per day as was widely reported in media, is a clear example of unemployed youth being vulnerable to exploitation by vested interests.

Tackling inequality by expanding reservations:
To provide equality of status and opportunity in education and employment, the principle of reservation was adopted so that the underprivileged classes could come at par with so-called privileged classes.
India's affirmative action policy has largely been confined and practised in the government sector, including jobs, and public education institutions.
Indian government now considers expanding reservation to other social parameters, for instance – expanding reservation based on gender and region-based.

Gender-based reservation:
- The participation of women in economic and formal workforce has been rather low.
- Nepal has 80 per cent of women are in the formal workforce while in India only 31 per cent are in the economic workforce.
- In emerging economies, as well as advanced countries, female participation is significantly higher than that of India.

There are empirical studies, including those from the multilateral institutions like the IMF, demonstrating that female participation enhances economic growth.
Also, following principles of Gandhiji, it would be useful to consider having more women through gender-based reservations in educational and vocational institutions, and in work places.

Region-based reservation:
In order to usher prosperity and achieve better integration with rest of country, the Union Government had mooted the idea of Second Green Revolution in North-East.
However, the policy of reservation can be effectively used to achieve objectives such as – education, employment and to tackle inequality in North East.
The government through University Grants Commission has launched special schemes like **Ishan Uday and Ishan Vikas** to encourage undergraduate students.

Components of Ishan Uday and Ishan Vikas:
- Visit of Class IX and Class XI students to 22 premier institutes [IITs, National Institutes of Techonology (NITs) and Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs)]

- Summer Internship for Engineering College students of the North-East for a duration of seven weeks at the Premier Institutes like IITs, NITs and IISERs.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has approved release of Rs. 605.45 lakhs from the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to IIT, Guwahati under the Ishan Vikas programme.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has launched "Ishan Uday" a Special Scholarship Scheme for North East Region (NER) from academic session 2014-15. Under the scheme ten thousand fresh scholarships are to be provided for general degree course, technical and professional courses including medical and para-medical courses.

Also, the Government has been making numerous efforts in spreading quality education in different states by opening institutions of excellence like All India Institutes of Medical Sciences, Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management.

Conclusion:

It looks more prudent now to consider and expand such 'Gender and Region-based reservations' along with 'Caste-based reservation' not only in areas of education but others such as employment.

- In a diverse country like India, to begin with, the government could consider such reservations in employment in government educational institutions and public sector enterprises.
- Annual reports of government institutions could publish a diversity index where region-wise employment status could be provided along with traditional caste-based reservation status.
- This adequate diversity of both language and culture, could help in achieving one and new India as in the case of the Naga, Assam or Madras regiments in the Indian Army.

The lack of opportunity to different citizens of India, which prides in diversity, could also be stifling economic growth. Therefore, the increase in gender and regional diversity in workforce will achieve sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as equitable distribution of progress and income.

Connecting the dots:

- Reservation is an affirmative action taken by the Government to cater to the needs of the backward classes. However, there is a need to compliment Caste-based reservations with Gender and Region-based reservations for tackling inequality effectively. Elucidate.
- Critically examine the need for expanding reservations to effectively tackle inequality, enhance human capital and productivity.

TOPIC
General Studies 1:
- ***Poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies***

General Studies 2:
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

General Studies 3:
- *Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment*

The conflict between Adaptation, Mitigation and Loss & Damage

Background:

In Paris in December 2015, countries across the globe agreed
- to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C;
- to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C; and
- to achieve net zero emissions in the second half of this century.

Each country also outlined what post-2020 climate actions they intended to take under the Paris Agreement, known as their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).

Three broad categories of Climate Change:

All the things to do under 'dealing with climate change' fall into following broad categories:

- **Mitigation-**

   It is about limiting further rise in global temperature. It involves phasing out fossil fuels and shifting to renewables, electric vehicles, green buildings etc.

- **Adaptation-**

   It is about what to do to cope with the effects of climate change that people are already facing.

- **Loss and damage (L&D)-**

   It is about the repair work that would need to be done after a certain climate event, say a hurricane, hits a place.

Divide over three broad categories:

- Mitigation is important to the developed countries. They are better equipped to handle disasters and they only need to ensure that the disasters don't grow bigger than they can handle.

- Adaptation is crucial for developing countries. India is particularly vulnerable to climate risks. North India will be visited upon alternately by floods and droughts if the Himalayan glaciers melt (they are melting).

- L&D measures are most important for the least developed countries, particularly the small island nations.

An equal attention is required:

Logically, equal attention should be paid on all the three.

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) brought out its (second) Adaptations Gap report, in which it agrees that adaptation has not gained much attentiom. Despite the awareness, it has not translated sufficiently into tangible action.
- The entire narrative around climate change has been heavily skewed (inclined) towards mitigation.
- The powerful developed world has made the whole climate narrative mitigation-centric because it seemingly is in their own interests.
- Even developed countries are not immune to climate impact. Thus, not paying enough attention towards adaptation would lead to strategic error. Example- the recent droughts and forest fires in California and the havoc-wreaking rains in Houston resulted into huge damage.

Climate related funds:

- **The Adaptation Fund,** conceived in 2001, took six years to operationalise. The $462 million fund has been given out in the ten years of its operations. At Bonn, Germany contributed €50 million to the fund.
- **The Green Climate Fund**, set up in 2010 with target of making available $100 billion annually by 2020, has so far collected a corpus of $9.2 billion only in the last seven years.

More allocation towards mitigation:

- The GCF was meant to divide its resources equally between mitigation and adaptation, but only a third of the allocations have gone to adaptation.
- Similar is the case with World Bank's allocations of its climate funds.
- Adaptation finance available to developing countries today is very less given the cost of damage is huge. Examples: Hurricane Maria that hit Puerto Rico recently resulted into loss of $45 billion. Typhoon Haiyan, which it the Phillipplines in 2014, cost the country $12 billion.

Challenges for India:

- India, has 121 highly climate-vulnerable agro-climatic zones, and thus urgently needs to pay attention to adaptation.
- India has its own National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change with ₹531 crore from the Budget. But the demand is so high that the government cannot manage from its own resources.

Way forward:

- India needs to seek more multilateral funding from the developed world going by the 'polluter pays' principle.

- Money is needed not only to build physical defences but also equally for increasing knowledge base of "adaptation science"—like predicting weather to developing heat-resistant crop varieties.

As Fiji has taken over the Presidency of the Conference of Parties (from Morocco), the country should course-correct the talks towards L&D and Adaptation. India, in its own interests, should be focus the talks towars adaptation.

Conclusion:

The importance of adaptation, even if global warming is to be limited to 2 degrees, can never be overstressed. The recent Emissions Gap Report of UNEP projects a 3 degrees warmer world by 2100. This means we should expect big trouble. The least we can do is to learn to deal with it and the first step towards it is to treat adaptation on par with mitigation.

Connecting the dots:

- Define adaptation, mitigation and loss and damage- the three broad categories of climate change. Across global negotiations there is more than required inclination towards adaptation, while logically equal attention should be paid on all three. Discuss.

TOPIC
General Studies 2

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.*

Bringing Transparency in Political Funding

Transparency in political funding is important:

Transparency in political funding is the global norm. The 255th Law Commission Report on Electoral Reforms observed that opacity in political funding results in "lobbying and capture" of the government by big donors.

The lower the transparency in political funding, the easier it is for the super-rich to buy the kind of government they want.

Issues with political funding:

Transparency in political funding in India is abysmal (very low).

- According to the NGO, Association of Democratic Reforms, 69% of the income of political parties is from unknown sources.
- Not only is the source unknown for the greater chunk of a party's income, even the very existence of this income is 'unknown', as it is not captured in any official record — either with the Election Commission (EC) or with the IT department.

Declaration norms:

Declaration norms for political funding are traditionally governed by four legislations:

- The Representation of the People Act (RPA).
- The IT Act.
- The Companies Act, and
- The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA).

Under these laws, political parties have to declare the source and the amount donated for all contributions above Rs. 20,000.

Other rules and regulations:

- Companies have to declare in their profit and loss (P&L) statement the party-wise break-up of political donations.
- A company must be at least three years old to contribute to a party. Its contribution cannot be more than 7.5% of its average net profit in the three preceding years.
- Parties cannot accept foreign contributions.

Recent changes:

- The Finance Act 2016, amended the FCRA to allow political parties to accept donations from foreign companies.
- The Finance Act 2017 amended the RPA, the Companies Act, the IT Act and the Reserve Bank of India Act has been amended to enable the issuance of electoral bonds.

What are electoral bonds?

Electoral bonds are essentially bearer bonds that ensure donor anonymity. They are like cash, but with an expiry date. These would be sold through notified banks. Let's say company 'X' wishes to contribute Rs. 100 crore to political party 'Y'. It could buy ten electoral bonds of Rs. 10 crore each from bank 'A'. These bonds would carry only a serial number and not the identity of the buyer. X would have these bonds deposited in Y's designated account with bank 'B'. B would know that this money belongs to Y but it doesn't record the fact that it has come from X.

Amendments made:

- The 7.5% cap on company donations has been eliminated (which means even loss-making companies can make unlimited donations).
- The requirement for a company to have been in existence for three years has been done away with (paving the way for fly-by-night shell companies).
- Companies no longer need to declare the names of the parties to which they have donated (so shareholders won't know where their money has gone).

For political parties:

- They no longer need to reveal the donor's name for contributions above Rs. 20,000, provided these are in the form of electoral bonds.

- In a nutshell, a foreign company can anonymously donate unlimited sums to an Indian political party without the EC or the IT department ever getting to know.

Danger to democracy:

The government's stated rationale for introducing electoral bonds was that they would protect donors from harassment by enabling anonymous contributions. The argument does not hold valid as only the government is in a position to harass, or alternatively, protect, donors from harassment by non-state harassers.

National Electoral Fund: An alternative

Former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi has suggested an alternative- a National Electoral Fund.

- All donors can contribute to this fund.
- The funds would be allocated to political parties in proportion to the votes they get.

This would protect the identity of donors, and also weed out black money from political funding.

Conclusion:

Declaration to an institution is not the same as disclosure to the public. The reforms in political funding should be such that the system becomes transparent thereby helping tackle black money issue, building public faith and strengthening democracy.

Connecting the dots:

- Bringing transparency in political funding is a long-sought reform. Electoral bonds proposed by the government in this regard does little to bring the required transparency. Critically analyze.
- Which is a better alternative for bringing transparency in political funding- Electoral Bonds or National Electoral Fund.

Also read: Political funding in India: towards more transparency?
https://iasbaba.com/2017/02/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-4th-february-2017/

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Important aspects of governance*

Digital divide: Reaching out to those who are at the bottom of digital pyramid

Background:

Digitization has received a significant policy push in India. There has been an emphasis on linking bank accounts and mobile number with Aadhaar, maintaining digital records, enforcing digital payments through demonetization or Aadhaar-enabled payments systems and making digitization as one of the core requirements in GST (goods and services tax) filings.

Preventing a digitally divided India:

The success of digitization crucially depends on its adoption by the majority of the population living in far-flung rural areas.

Without this, the result could be islands of the unempowered communities at the bottom of the digital pyramid with vast skill gaps risking a digitally divided India.

The challenges of digitization at the bottom of the digital pyramid:

- Smartphones are expected to share the bulk of the workload in digital India. However, their share currently is around 33% of the mobile users (expected to reach around 40% by 2019). The mobile phone internet user penetration among Indian population is still about 24% and even by 2020 is expected to reach just 35%.
- Financial exclusion- A recent study by Assocham and EY reports that 19% of the Indian population remains unbanked or financially excluded. Digital India programme without addressing issues like this will only magnify the digital inequality in the country.
- Uninterrupted access to power- Around 22% of rural households (roughly 40 million) across the country still do not have access to electricity. More than half of the rural households in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are yet to have access to power.

What needs to be done?

Increasing absorptive capacity in rural areas:

- Training-
  Internet and mobile application training aimed at less educated and the low-income groups. Users with working knowledge of internet and smartphone applications are more likely to accept digitalization tools.
- Task-technology fit: Digitization tools and technology should meet the needs of people at the bottom of the digital pyramid which could get served by digitization. Task-technology fit is significant for continual usage of new-age digital devices.
- The service charges should be commensurate with the benefits of digitization. This becomes more important for people at the bottom of the digital pyramid who stay stretched to make both ends meet on a daily basis.
- Structural assurance- Existence of technological and legal institutions to ensure security would increase adaptability. Initial confidence in mobile-based banking can be secured through structural assurance. The right to privacy is the first step in that direction.

- Literacy- The aptitude to read, write, comprehend and communicate is a must to participate in the digitization movement. India's current literacy rate is at 80%, and there are expectations of achieving 100% over the next five years. Literacy would lead to participation and empowerment in a digital India only when it can ensure lifelong reading ability.

Conclusion:

There is a need of further thoughts, plans, programmes and actions to touch the population at the bottom of the digital pyramid on a continuous basis to make a unified, powerful and an empowered Digital India.

Connecting the dots:

- Success of digitization crucially depends on its adoption by the majority of the population living in far-flung rural areas. Thus, there is an urgent need of increasing the absorptive capacity of people living in such areas. Discuss.

TOPIC
General Studies 2:

- ***Parliament and State Legislatures? structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.***

Ensuring more Parliament sittings

Background:

Parliament's role in the decision-making process is becoming more marginal than it was in the formative years of Indian democracy. The decrease in the number of sittings of Parliament reflects poorly on its image as the highest law-making body.

Sessions of Parliament:

- There are normally three sessions in a year: the budget session (February-May), the monsoon session (July-September), and the winter session (November-December).
- The question of having fixed dates for the start of the three sessions was considered by the General Purpose Committee of the Lok Sabha at a sitting held on April 22, 1955.
- It recommended a time table for the three sessions. Later these recommendations were adopted by the Cabinet. The sessions start on different dates, though more or less in specified months in the parliamentary calendar. However, this time table has clearly not been observed in practice.

Parliamentary sittings- Decreasing over time:

- In the initial years of our Republic, Lok Sabha sat for about 125-140 days a year (this is despite poor connectivity in those days).
- Though it is far easier to travel today, Parliament has met for just 65-75 days per year in the last couple of decades.

Worse is the situation in State assemblies:
- Data for 20 Assemblies over the last five years indicate that they meet for 29 days a year on average.
- States such as Haryana (12 days a year) and Uttarakhand (13 days) rarely meet.
- There have also been some extreme cases in terms of session time. Example: a two-minute session in Puducherry assembly and a 10-minute session in Uttar Pradesh.

In the United Kingdom, the House of Commons met for an average of 150 days a year over the last fifteen years. The United States House of representatives met for an average of 140 days every year during the same period.

Consequences:
- Less scrutiny of the government's actions, and of bills and budgets. Less number of sittings means less effective Parliament.
- It has a detrimental effect on the ability of Parliamentarians to carry forward their constitutional responsibilities.

Importance of regular sessions:
- The holding of Parliament sessions in a regular manner is vital in a representative democracy as it is Parliament that links the government with the people.
- Parliament is the prime and foremost debating body, where functions such as the consideration of policy and legislation, articulation of constituency grievances or issues of national importance can be performed and solutions found.
- A serious and proactive Parliament can aid good governance.
- Dr. Ambedkar felt that daily assessment as in Parliamentary system is more effective in holding governments to account, and more appropriate for India.

What does constitution say? The Constitution under **Article 85** specifies that Parliament will be summoned by the President; the President shall act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers; and there cannot be more than six months between two sittings of Parliament. Similar provisions exist for State legislatures. Thus, it is effectively the Prime Minister (or the Chief Minister) who determines when Parliament (or an Assembly) will meet, subject to the gap being less than six months. Effectively, this provision gives the government the power to decide when Parliament shall meet to oversee its functioning. It is important that an independent Parliament meets often, and is able to convene itself without the permission of the government.

Way out:
- Diluting the power of the government to be the sole decider of session dates. The issues of the government deciding when to summon the legislature, and its ability to adjust the dates in response to emerging circumstances needs to be addressed.
- Considering the practice in countries, like the UK and Australia, where an annual calendar of sittings is announced in advance. This will allow better scheduling of business and reduce the scope for the government to postpone a session if it wants to defer parliamentary scrutiny on some emergent issue.
- A variant, such as that followed by the British Parliament, is to have year-long sessions. Thus, the five-year term of Parliament consists of five sessions of a year each.
- Allowing a significant minority of members to call for a session. Pakistan's Constitution requires a session of Parliament within 14 days if one-fourth of its membership demands one. It also states that Parliament should meet at least 130 days every year and there should be at least three sessions.
- The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution had recommended that a minimum number of working days for Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha should be fixed at 120 and 100 respectively. In 2008, Rajya Sabha MP Mahendra Mohan introduced a private member bill to amend the constitution to specify a minimum of 120 working days.

Conclusion:

If Parliament were to meet more frequently, the pressure of completing legislative business in a limited time will also ease up leading to lesser number of pending bills. More parliamentary sitting days will allow both the treasury and opposition benches adequate time to bring their issues to the floor of the House.

Connecting the dots:
- Parliament's role in the decision-making process is becoming more marginal than it was in the formative years of Indian democracy. Critically analyse.

TOPIC

General studies 2:
- ***Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.***

Need of Anti-Superstition law: A debate

Background:

The Maharashtra government has enacted an anti-superstition law. And another such law is in process in Karnataka.

Superstition in India:

- Over recent decades, around 800 women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha have been killed for practising witchcraft.
- Faith healers, on occasion, inflict physical injury to exercise spirits or cure ailments.
- Practices like branding children with heated objects and using spurious surgical methods to change the sex of a foetus are common.
- Made-snana, a ritual where devotees from across castes roll over the leftover food of Brahmins in certain temples to cure themselves of skin diseases
- In Maharashtra, there were several cases where people murdered or brutally injured others and held them responsible for some deaths in their families, merely on suspicion.

Maharashtra:

Maharashtra has implemented the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013.

The Maharashtra legislation has stopped the act of human sacrifice. Before this law, acts involving human sacrifice could not be stopped as they were preceded by some puja and offerings — not banned under any law.

The anti-superstition law also makes it possible to curtail activities of so-called godmen before they become too powerful. A section in the legislation specifically addresses and checks claims made by 'godmen' who say they have supernatural powers.

Constitutional angle:

Anti-superstition law can be seen as a reasonable restriction on the right to practise and propagate one's religion under Article 25 of the Constitution. As long as these restrictions are in the interest of public order, morality and health, the law may withstand the test of constitutionality.

A separate law is not needed:

The question of whether we need a separate law to curb superstitious practices has to be debated.

- Legal framework exists to address such crimes. For instance, throwing a child on thorns is an offence under Sections 307 and 323 of the IPC. Similarly, parading a woman naked can also be addressed specifically by Section 354B of the IPC.
- It is hard to make a case for retaining harmful religious practices. Everything that appears irrational to the less believing cannot be prohibited by law.

A separate law is needed:

Present IPC not equipped-

- The cognisance of human sacrifice is in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) only after the murder is committed.
- The present IPC is not equipped to take care of crimes committed on account of black magic and other superstitious practices.
- A separate law is necessary because the relationship between a devotee and so-called godman is of a peculiar nature, often marked by violence.
- Example- The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, 2005. There are provisions in the IPC to punish violence, but the peculiar nature of the violence faced by women within the family needed a separate law.
- Legislation has a capacity to act as a deterrent.

Way forward:

- Curbing superstitious practices requires effective implementation and enforcement of existing laws as punishment curbs the rate of crime and not the type or the quantum of punishment.
- The enforcement machinery needs a major overhaul to make criminal justice more accessible. Enacting special laws for each set of crimes is no solution and makes the problem worse.
- A discussion can be initiated between the temple authorities and devotees on alternative rituals which are not harmful.

Conclusion:

India needs legislation on superstition. Superstitious practices that are utterly dehumanising, brutal and exploitative need to be dealt with by a law that specifically addresses them.

However, it is education and awareness that can truly liberate a society from superstition, blind faith and abominable practices in the name of faith. Until then, the law will have to continue to identify and punish acts that violate the people's right to life, health and dignity.

Connecting the dots:

- India needs legislation on superstition or not. Critically analyze.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- ***Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.***

- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.*

Protecting Children in India

In news:
According to a recent survey by a humanitarian aid organisation, one out of every two Indian children has experienced sexual abuse. India is home to 19 per cent of the world's children.

Issue:
- Homes and schools, assumed to be safe and secure havens for our children, have been reporting cases of abuse, exploitation and violence.
- Despite legislations our performance in creating robust and reliable preventive response systems has been markedly poor.
- Brutal crimes against children demonstrates that our collective approach to child safety in schools remains ad hoc, laissez-faire and poorly monitored, highlighting the lack of both soft and hard preventive infrastructure.
- There is a three-way trust deficit between schools, parents and the Government. Whenever there is a gruesome incidence of violence against children, NGOs, parents, school associations and representatives of the Government get locked into defensive or confrontational positions.

Of course, the guilty must be punished, but more than that, we need a system that can permanently eliminate the abuse of children.

Government's initiative:
The National Policy for Children 2013- The Government drafted the National Policy for Children 2013 to "build a preventive and responsive child protection system and promote effective enforcement of punitive legislative and administrative measures against all forms of child abuse and neglect".

Children-specific legislations- We have brought in children-specific legislations such as the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 (POCSO) and the amended Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015.

Guidelines-
The ministry for human resource development has comprehensive guidelines that take into consideration physical infrastructure such as separate and age-appropriate toilets to safeguard children in school. These also take into account issues related to a school's staff such as background checks and mental make-up.

Way forward:

- Uniform policy- We need to develop a Uniform Child Protection Policy for all schools, whether private or government, and even tribal ashramshalas (residential schools) in remote parts of the country.
- Gatekeeping- The policy should emphasise 'gatekeeping' to ensure that the recruitment of both teaching and non-teaching staff is done after thorough police verification and psycho-social assessment.
- Mandatory compliance- The ministry of human resource guidelines need to be made mandatory and compliance must be made non-negotiable.
- Counsellors- It should also be mandatory for schools to enroll trained counsellors who can both prevent and detect abuse of children — this could be an existing teacher who has undergone the requisite training or a separate counsellor. Children need to have a designated point of contact and it needs to be assured that there is a safe space where they can speak and be heard.
- Sensitisation- All teachers need to be sensitised about child abuse, taught to recognise it and made aware of laws such as the POCSO Act which makes reporting such acts compulsory.
- Curriculum- Sessions with children on safety and prevention of abuse ought to become part of the curriculum.
- Open dialogue- An open dialogue involving all three stakeholders (Schools, Parents, Governments) can go a long way towards creating the right ecosystem for building preventive response mechanisms.
- Role of parents- Parents can be a source of support and strength. By being watchful guardians, they can ensure that schools follow the guidelines for child protection and by being supportive, they can ensure that any instance of abuse is quickly brought to light. Parents need to realise that even though they have entrusted their children to the school, the safety of their child is a collective responsibility.

Conclusion:
Protecting children is a common shared responsibility; it cannot be done in isolation by either the school or parents or government. We must all work together to make sure instances of child abuse soon become historical references and not present-day realities.

Connecting the dots:
- One out of every two Indian children have experienced sexual abuse. Discuss the issue and highlight the measures that should be taken to protect Indian children especially school-going ones.
- Protecting children is a common shared responsibility; it cannot be done in isolation by either the school or parents or government. Discuss the responsibility of each stakeholder in protecting children from sexual abuse.

General studies 3:

- *Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights*

Reviewing the GI Act, 1999

Background:

The law of Geographical Indications (GIs) is linked to the terroir, that is the quality of a product is essentially attributable to the territory where the product originates from.

GI Act, 1999:

GIs indicate goods as originating in a specific geographical region, the characteristics, qualities or reputation thereof essentially attributable to such region. Complying with the World Trade Organisation-Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (WTO-TRIPS) obligations, India enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act, 1999 (GI Act) and has set up a registry in Chennai to register such names. Covering agricultural goods, manufactured and natural goods, textiles, handicrafts and foodstuffs, the GI Registry's website lists popular GIs like Basmati rice, Darjeeling tea and Pashmina shawls etc.

Significance of GIs:

- GIs support local production and are an important economic tool for the uplift of rural and tribal communities. GIs support and protect local production (as opposed to global production), generate local employment and are mostly untouched by industrialisation, originating in villages or small towns.
- Unlike other Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) which guarantee the protection of individual interest, GI is a collective right. If their products qualify, producers can use the collective GI mark while commercially exploiting their products.
- Geographical indications (GI) can be used to protect traditional knowledge and communities.
- GIs can help built up ancillary industries like tourism and lodging in the respective regions, enabling visitors to get a first-hand experience of the manufacturing process and absorb the history thereof. Such ancillary industries also create local employment and aid in the socio-economic development of the region in the long run.

Shortcomings of the Indian GI Act:

- The existing law for Geographical Indications leans too heavily on documentary proof.
  Cause for concern:
  Proof of origin is a mandatory criterion for registering GIs in India. The cause of concern is the focus on historic proof in the form of documentary evidence (such as gazetteers,

published documents, news articles, advertisement materials) to bring out the historic development of GIs as laid down under GI Rules, 2002, and clarified by the GI Manual of the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks, and Registrar of Geographical Indications <u>to establish proof of origin</u>.

Challenge: Documentary evidence as proof of origin may be a foolproof mechanism to ensure the link between the product and territory, but in a country, such as India where there are regions like the Northeast where oral history has had far wider convention over written history, this provision becomes a hurdle. There is no mandate for such a provision under TRIPs to do so. TRIPS only provide a minimum standard of protection. Nowhere is there an insistence on a particular framework for protection of GI.

The case of Assam: Assam has been exploring its natural, agricultural and traditional products as potential GI material. One such example is a traditional rice wine called 'Judima'.

The State government has been tracking academic discourse on the subject with the intent of exploring possibilities in registering it.

A hurdle has been the difficulty in gathering documentary evidence as proof of origin. It is the same case with many other products from the Northeast.

For most products, especially those of tribal communities, this is bound to be a recurrent problem.

- GI registration in India is done not by the actual producers, but by some third-party — either in Government or an NGO, with or without commercial interest and even traders. In such cases, producers very often are not even aware of the existence of GI. In such a situation, producers or the people who are the depository of knowledge are unlikely to be benefited.
- The legal framework for the protection of GIs in India does not emphasise on the importance of quality products. India's GI Act does not lay much emphasis on inspection and monitoring mechanisms for GI protection.

Conclusion:

The GI authorities should amend the existing provision regarding proof of origin. The current Indian legal framework for GIs also needs to be strengthened to address quality control and consumer expectations by insisting on multi-layered quality control systems as a precondition for registration.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the shortcomings of the Indian GI Act especially the one related to proof of origin.

TOPIC
General studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections*
- *Social Issue – Child labour and related issues*

Is the world losing the battle against Child Labour?

Global child labour estimates
- 152 million children – 64 million girls and 88 million boys – are in child labour globally, accounting for almost one in ten of all children worldwide.
- 71% of children in child labour work in the agricultural sector and 69% perform unpaid work within their own family unit.
- Nearly half of all those in child labour are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety, and moral development.
- 4.3 million children in forced labour, a worst form of child labour.

Therefore, the international community has declared that the persistence of child labour in today's world is unacceptable and, in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has renewed its commitment to eliminating all forms of child labour by 2025.

Sustainable Development Goal for ending child labour
- **SDG Goal 8** (decent work and economic growth): focuses on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth and full and productive employment and decent work for all.
- **SDG Target 8.7** aims to "take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms."

Under the SDG agenda, UN member states, employers' and workers' organizations, as well as civil society organizations urged to eliminate child labour by 2025, and forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030.

Current position:
Two years after governments set the above discussed 2025 target to end child labour, delegates from 100 nations at a recent Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour held in Buenos Aires were told that they will miss the deadline.

Recently launched International Labour Organization (ILO) reports also caution that the world will not achieve the SDG goal of ending child labour unless society "dramatically" increases its efforts to end modern slavery and child labour.

The report hinted that realizing the objective could take well over 20 years after the expiry of the 2030 SDGs.

- Overall, there was a slowdown in the reduction of child labour, just one percentage point, during the four years until 2016.
- More worrisome is that there was almost no progress with respect to the rescue of children under 12 years in the four years since 2012.
- Equally, the decline in child labour among girls was only half the proportion of that of boys during this period.

Child labour is declining far too slowly, in the midst of unprecedented growth in migration and forced displacement that aggravate the situation.

Failures:

ILO report points to four systemic failures that underpin the lack of progress:

1. Absence of an effective national legislation: There is a need for an efficient national legislation to give effect to global conventions on the employment of children in hazardous industries, as well as on the minimum age of work.
2. Lack of harmony between global commitments and domestic priorities.
3. Lack of effective labour inspections in the informal economy: A strong legal framework that mandates punitive action against offending firms and recruitment of youth and adults are important tools to guarantee the protection of children.
4. Absence of strong collective bargaining mechanisms and effective social protection policies from the cradle to the end of their lives.

Solution:

To end modern slavery, the report recommends:

- Stronger social protection floors to offset the vulnerabilities that push people into slavery;
- Extending labour rights in the informal economy to protect workers from exploitation; and
- Improving migration governance.
- The report also elaborates on the importance of addressing gender considerations and tackling modern slavery as part of humanitarian actions in areas of fragility, conflict and crisis.

Conclusion:

The argument that has long held sway is that child labour, however unfortunate, is inevitable as long as households remained poor. Only after parents escape poverty will their children be able to enter school. What these claims ignore is that the reverse is far more true. That child labour is indeed a major cause of persisting poverty. That if a child is trapped in labour instead of being able to attend fully to her schooling, she will never be able to escape the poverty of her parents. The child of a sanitation worker, rag-picker, domestic

worker or casual labourer is likely to be trapped in the professions of her parents unless she is able to access quality education.

We should not be the generation that will preside over a system when the state dropped the ball – and our children and we pay the price for it, under the garb of doing right for them.

Economic development, investment, women and child welfare and job creation should be given their rightful place in budgetary allocation. Amidst the furore over the recent juvenile crimes and release we should be able to think of such positive steps so that another child is not turned into a criminal because of avoidable circumstances.
Child is meant to learn, NOT to earn

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think the existing legal and institutional support is adequate to end the menace of child labour in India? Critically comment.

NATIONAL

TOPIC
General Studies 1:

- *Social empowerment*

General Studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes*

General Studies 3:

- *Indian economy and issues related to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*

Improving female participation in workforce

In news:
According to the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2017", India's ranking has fallen by 21 places from last year.
We currently are far below the global average and also behind our neighbours China and Bangladesh.

Poor participation in workforce:

- As per the World Bank report, we have one of the lowest workforce female participation rates, ranking 120th among 131.
- One of the areas where we have fared poorly is in wages and participation of women in the economy where our rank is an abysmal 139. This is not the first report to highlight the plight of our women.
- Even in terms of contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), women are currently under-represented. At 17%, India has a lower share of women's contribution to GDP than the global average of 37%.
- The participation levels in workforce have been dropping in the last few years. The National Sample Survey found that while in 1999-2000, 25.9% of all women worked; by 2011-12 this proportion had dropped to 21.9%.

Explanation behind:
A possible explanation is that with rising household income, women now have the opportunity to choose leisure over work, especially in agricultural sectors and on construction sites, and focus on their families. However, research has shown that when women have access to more work opportunities, they gladly take them.

Women do seek opportunities:
The India Human Development Survey highlighted that the provision of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) brought more rural women into wage labour. Among MGNREGA workers in 2011-12, a whopping 45% were not in wage labour before the scheme was initiated, which means that women do seek opportunities to earn a stable wage.

More participation in informal economy rather than formal one: According to an International Labour Organization study, the participation of women in informal employment and non-standard forms of employment (for eg. part-time jobs or jobs in the informal sector) is higher than men. The share of women in services and industry is less than 20%.

Disadvantages:
- Fewer skilling opportunities and lack of job security.
- A woman is less likely to find stable job opportunities within the informal sectors.
- Poor quality and even unsafe working conditions, low wages and denial of statutory benefits like social security.
- Higher risks of discrimination as compared to male colleagues.
- Wages not only below the statutory minimum wage but also much less than her male counterparts' and benefits like maternity leave or related facilities, which are meant to keep women in the workforce, will not be accessible to her in the informal sector.

Women opting out of employment:

The lack of safe working conditions, social security benefits, and a fair wage that can only be paid by formal sector employers with high productivity and output ratios, induces women to opt out of employment.

What needs to be done?

To take their rightful place within Indian workforce and society at large, our women need lot more formal sector employment opportunities with better wages. For this formal sector employment need to grow.

- The existing complex and conflicting regulatory cholesterol and inconsistent legislation are currently impeding formal job creation.
- A total revamping of the regulatory ecosystem is required.
- Sustained reforms in labour laws and skilling ecosystems will help in creation of formal jobs.
- A change in thought process about the role of women in society and the economy is required.
- Huge investments will be needed in upskilling and educating women and the girl child, financial inclusion of women, encouraging women entrepreneurs and strengthening legal provisions for safety and security of women.

Increased availability of stable-wage jobs for women is critical to preventing the socio-economic exploitation of women, improving their quality of life, enhancing a woman's control over household decision-making and enabling her to lead a life of dignity. Formalization of India's job market is one the crucial step in this regard.

Conclusion:

It is estimated that India can potentially boost its GDP by $700 billion in 2025, translating to 1.4% per year of incremental GDP growth, by raising female labour-force participation rate by just 10 percentage points, from 31% to 41%. This can be possible only if formalization of jobs takes place.

Connecting the dots:

- Female workforce participation rates are far below the global average and also behind our neighbors China and Bangladesh. Discuss the reasons behind. Formalization of jobs is the way out. Analyse.

Also read: **Missing women in India's labour force**
https://iasbaba.com/2017/06/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-6th-june-2017/

TOPIC
General Studies 2:

- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation*

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016: Re-introduction

In news:

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has decided to re-introduce the original Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 in the winter session of Parliament. Despite resistance to the 2016 Bill followed by a year-long process to redraft it to reflect the demands of the community, the Ministry has taken the decision, and without a single change.

Historical background:

- In NALSA v. Union of India, the Supreme Court recognised that transgender persons have fundamental rights.
- The judgment was followed by a private member's Bill, the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014, which was unanimously passed in the Rajya Sabha.
  Instead of introducing it in the Lok Sabha, the Ministry uploaded its own Bill, the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2015, on its website in December for public comments.
  The 2015 Bill, which was largely based on the 2014 Bill, did away with the national and State commissions for transgender persons and transgender rights courts.
  The Bill was fairly progressive since it granted a transgender person the right to be identified as a 'man', 'woman' or 'transgender'.
- The 2016 Bill, that was finally introduced in the Lok Sabha, was a conservative one instead. A highly diluted version, it also pathologised transgender persons by defining them as "partly female or male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male".
- Met with backlash, the Ministry set up an expert standing committee on social justice and empowerment to examine the Bill.

Issues:

- The proposed definition of 'transgender person' in the Bill "not only violates the fundamental rights to equality, dignity, autonomy but also freedom of transgender persons guaranteed under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution".
- Transgender persons remain at risk of criminalization under Section 377. The Bill doesn't recognize the rights of transgender persons to partnership and marriage.

The Standing committee report:

The standing committee criticised the 2016 Bill for its stark deficiencies. It recommended:

- Re-drafting the <u>definition of a 'transgender person' to make it inclusive and accurate.</u>
- Providing for the definition of discrimination and setting up a grievance redress mechanism to address cases of discrimination.
- Granting reservations to transgender persons.
- The committee insisted that the law must grant equal civil rights to transgender persons (marriage, divorce and adoption).
- Provision of separate public toilets, counselling services to cope with trauma and violence as well as separate frisking zones for transgender persons at public places were some other recommendations made by the committee.

Conclusion:

The decision to re-introduce the 2016 Bill on transgender rights makes a mockery of democratic norms. The Ministry's decision to re-introduce the 2016 Bill disregards the pre-legislative consultative policy which requires Ministries to grant a minimum of 30 days for public comments and to place a summary of feedback/comments received from the public/other stakeholders on their website.

Connecting the dots:

- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 had many flaws which were highlighted by the parliamentary standing committee as well. Discuss the issues and the recommendations of the committee.

TOPIC
General Studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

General Studies 3:

- *Science and Technology – developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.*
- *Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.*

For free and open Internet: Net Neutrality

Basics: What is Net Neutrality?

- Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers (ISP) and governments should treat all traffic equally, and not charge differently based on content/site/application. Users should be able to access all websites at the same speed and cost.

- This principle is considered a cornerstone of a free and open internet that provides equal access to all.
- The term was coined by Columbia University media law professor Tim Wu in 2003.

Why in news?

- Recently, India's telecom regulator (TRAI) has published recommendations strongly backing net neutrality.
- It requires that barriers should not be created by telecom and Internet service providers for user choice by limiting their power to discriminate between content providers and different classes of content. Through binding rules and regulations, the power of access providers to selectively price or create technical imbalances is to be corrected.
- In India, the debate on net neutrality picked speed after Facebook launched the Free Basics program in December 2015.
- The TRAI (during February 2016) had barred telecom service providers from charging differential rates for data services, thus prohibiting Facebook's Free Basics and Airtel Zero platform by Airtel in their present form.

Note:

There are no laws enforcing net neutrality in India. Violations of net neutrality have been common in India. Examples beyond Facebook's Internet.org include Aircel's Wikipedia Zero along with Aircel's free access to Facebook and WhatsApp, Airtel's free access to Google, and RCom's free access to Twitter.

TRAI has mandated that ISPs (Internet Service Providers) should not deploy any discriminatory practices such as blocking, degrading or slowing down of certain web traffic while giving preferential treatment to any specific content at the same time.

The TRAI paper also suggests the formation of a regulatory body to monitor and deal with any such violation of net neutrality.

If the recommendations by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) are accepted by the communications ministry, India will be ahead of the curve in internet rights.

It brings the country a step closer to what could be the world's most progressive policy on equal internet access for all.

The TRAI's decision is significant not just in setting a benchmark for other emerging countries that are considering similar regulations, but also in signalling a market-friendly regulatory approach to content providers.

Understanding the Net Neutrality debate:

When users pay an ISP for an internet plan, they are entitled to be able to access all online content, be it videos, games, news or social media sites, at the same broadband speed they have signed up for. This has been the basic principle guiding internet and ISP since the beginning.

- However in 2007, US-based ISP Comcast Corp. was reportedly found to be delaying upload of files on Bitorrent. Delay in uploads affected the download speed as Bitorrent is a peer-to-peer service.

- FCC (Federal Communication Commission), an agency of US government, ordered Comcast in August 2008 to stop the discriminatory practice.
- The issue of net neutrality gathered momentum in 2015 when then US president Barack Obama pledged support for it and urged the agency to come with a strong rule on it.
- FCC ruled in favour of net neutrality, prohibiting any ISP from blocking, throttling, or giving special treatment in terms of speed to a content provider who has paid more than others.

The FCC's position on net neutrality has changed under the new regime. The agency plans to repeal the net neutrality rules to regulate ISPs passed under the Obama administration through a vote on 14 December 2017.

Indian context:

In India, the debate on net neutrality picked speed after Facebook launched the Free Basics program in December 2015, earlier known as internet.org.

Free Basics gives free access to basic internet services to users who could not afford 4G data plans and were still using slower 2G networks. Though, Facebook wasn't charging users anything extra, the notion of favouring access to certain content went against the basic principle of net neutrality.

TRAI banned Free Basics and other similar services such as Airtel Zero in February 2016.

Concerns:

(Case 1) An ISP could make it harder for users to access parts of the internet to drive more traffic on its own content-sharing platform. A lot of ISPs have their own video and music streaming service. Without net neutrality regulation, they can try to throttle access to services of a rival.

- For instance, during 2014 Netflix accused Comcast of interfering with buffering speed and visual quality on the video streaming platform. The issue was resolved after Netflix agreed to pay for access to CDN networks.

(Case 2) In various countries with no regulation on net neutrality, ISPs are already clubbing content into packages, compelling users to pay for apps and websites which were previously free.

- For example, Lisbon-based ISP MEO has got five different packs—Social (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Messaging (WhatsApp, Viber, Skype), Video (Netflix, YouTube, Twitch), Music (Pay Music, Spotify, TuneIn) and email and cloud (Gmail, Drive, Dropbox). To access these apps, subscribers have to pay an extra amount per month for every pack on top of the fee that they are already paying for the broadband connection to the ISP.

(Case 3) If net neutrality is not adhered to, ISPs can use their last mile infrastructure to block Internet applications and content (e.g. websites, services, and protocols), and even to block out competitors. Thus the ISPs will create an exploitative business model playing the role of gatekeepers and being able to control which websites load quickly, load slowly, or don't load at all.

(Case 4) Another concern with lack of net neutrality is of different speed lanes and the effect it will have on startups that do not have the resource to pay for faster lanes.

- Studies have shown that slow loading websites frustrate users and this had a negative impact on the content provider.
- The study showed that websites which load in 5 seconds against 19 seconds witnessed 25% higher ad views, 70% longer average sessions and 35% lower bounce rates.
- So content providers who are on slower lanes will miss out to rivals who can afford to pay for the faster lanes.

Why Net Neutrality is good?

- Net neutrality creates rules of the road for a free and open Internet.
- In a recent judgment on the allocation of natural resources, Supreme Court had observed that "as natural resources are public goods, the doctrine of equality, which emerges from concepts of justice and fairness, must guide the state in determining the actual mechanism for distribution of material resources."
- Beyond equality and reasonableness, a more tangible appreciation of Net neutrality is immediately felt on our liberty.
- The Internet today affords millions of Indians with an immediate audience without the traditional costs of distribution. Tinkering with its character, or carving it up in slices (as would happen in the absence of Net neutrality), would fragment its community and the diversity of choice offered by it. This would impact both the right to speak and the ability to receive knowledge, hence impacting our right to freedom of speech and expression.
- Net neutrality provides a level-playing field to content providers and startups. Net Neutrality lowers the barriers of entry and operations for entrepreneurs, startups and small businesses by ensuring the Web is a fair and level playing field.
- We need the open Internet to foster job growth, competition and innovation.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you understand by net neutrality? Critically analyse in light of the recent decisions taken by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

INTERNATIONAL

TOPIC
General Studies 2:
- *India and its International relations.*
- *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.*

Engaging big powers in South Asia

In news:
India has accepted an invitation to join the Japan-proposed, U.S.-endorsed plan for a "Quadrilateral" grouping including Australia to provide alternative debt financing for countries in the Indo-Pacific. The idea of quadrilateral dialogue with India, Japan and Australia was proposed by US.

Significant turn in policy:
India is ready to cooperate with other countries into what India has always fiercely guarded Indo-Pacific sphere of activity.

However, there are examples of India working with other nations in the region like- working with the U.S. on transmission lines in Nepal or with Japan on a liquefied natural gas pipeline in Sri Lanka.

Still, India has accepted that it requires "other parties" in the neighbourhood, even as it seeks to counter the influence of China and its Belt and Road Initiative.

Why India is not able to handle the situation in Indo-Pacific independently?

India's needs clashing with those of neighbors:
As a growing economy with ambitious domestic targets, India's own needs often clash with those of its neighbours. More connectivity will eventually mean more competition, whether it is for trade, water resources, or energy.

Take, for example, the case of Bhutan, which is working, with India's assistance, on its own goal of producing 10,000 MW of hydropower by 2020. There have been reports of Bhutan's external debt rising because of delays in hydropower projects owing construction delays, mainly due to Indian construction issues. Despite several pleas to the Ministries of External Affairs and Power, the guidelines issued by India, which put severe restrictions on Bhutanese companies selling power, and on allowing them access to the power exchange with Bangladesh, have not been revised.

Projects not taken seriously:

Another problem is what one diplomat in the region calls 'India's big game hunting attitude': "India chases its neighbours to cooperate on various projects, but once the project is finalised, the implementation is not taken seriously.

- Over the past decade, India passed up offers to build the port in Hambantota, Colombo, and Kankesanthurai, despite Sri Lanka's pressing need for infrastructure. With the U.S. and other Western countries also taking strident positions over human rights issues and the reconciliation process, Chinese companies stepped in and won these projects.
- New Delhi has changed its position on Hambantota several times, going from initial apathy, to disapproval of the Chinese interest, to telling that the project would not be viable.

Contradictory ideas while tackling political issues in its region:

India falls somewhere between the U.S., which has openly championed concerns over 'democratic values' and human rights in Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bangladesh, and the approach of China, which is to turn a blind eye to all but business and strategic interests.

- In Nepal, India lost out to China when it allowed a five-month-long blockade at the border, calling for a more inclusive constitution to be implemented by Kathmandu.
- India reversed its stand in Rohingya issue case, leading to the sense that it is unsure of its next steps when dealing with neighbors on political issues.

Conclusion:

While the government's new plan to involve the U.S. and Japan in development projects in South Asia will yield the necessary finances, it will come at the cost of India's leverage in its own backyard. The emergence of new players like the U.S., Europe and Japan has only increased multiple regional rivalries in the region. Thus, the government must be cautious about bringing big powers into South Asia

Connecting the dots:

- The government is planning to involve US, Japan and Australia in the development projects in South Asia. Discuss the prospects and the issues involved.
- While India seeks to counter the influence of China and its Belt and Road Initiative, it is not able to handle the situation in Indo-Pacific independently. Critically analyze.

TOPIC
General Studies 2:
- ***India and its neighbourhood- relations.***

- *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests*

India-South Korea: Expanding ties

In news:

Recent political developments between India and South Korea have created an opening for the two countries to share mutual security interests in Asia. President Moon Jae-in, who celebrated his administration's 100th day in office two months ago with strong public support, has invited India into South Korea's diplomatic domain. South Korea dispatched a special envoy to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reinforce bilateral relations. The clear message is to place India on par with the US, Russia, China, and Japan.

Mutual strategic recalibration between India and South Korea:

Expanding ties between the two countries would produce substantial convergence of interest in planning global and regional strategic frameworks. The mutual strategic recalibration between India and South Korea is a modest effect of their growing partnership since 2010.

South Korea:

It has emphasised its desire for stronger security cooperation with India and in reinforcing strategic and military ties. Seoul's strategic calculation appears to be in searching for a stronger diplomatic stand on imminent regional issues beyond the alliance system.

Balancing East Asia affairs: The South Korean administration's approach to India is an unambiguous gesture toward balancing East Asian affairs more broadly than before.

- From Seoul's perspective, the enduring regional tensions in South Asia — especially between India and China — create a common interest for India and South Korea to discuss a collaborative approach for regional stability.
- South Korea's key interest in managing their nuclear neighbour on the Korean Peninsula is similar to India's considerations toward Pakistan. The provocation of North Korea's nuclear weapons development and the premeditated launch of its nuclear-capable missiles continues to augment impending pressures on South Korea. The US alliance system, established with South Korea and Japan, puts pressure on North Korea to cap its nuclear programme; however, this long-lasting regional security dilemma is filled with continued verbal provocations and a conventional arms race among all actors.

Supporting India:

Seoul continued to support New Delhi's approach to nuclear nonproliferation with the civil nuclear pact in 2011. During negotiations, Seoul conveyed that it valued India's clean NPT record more than its status of a non-NPT signatory. With this strong foothold, South Korea

played a critical role in moderating opposing members in India's application for the Nuclear Suppliers' Group's membership as a host country of a plenary meeting. Seoul's move was bolder and more independent than that of any other US ally in Asia.

India:

New Delhi too is in favour of Seoul-Delhi ties.

Containing North Korea:

- Early this year, New Delhi started building an increasingly incompatible stance toward North Korea.
- At Seoul's request, the Modi government discontinued the provision of training courses to North Korean students in the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific, Dehradun, and suspended the training of North Korean soldiers in Indian languages in a Madhya Pradesh-based military school.
- India also aligned with the UN to ban all trade with North Korea except for humanitarian aid.
- India implemented a plan to launch a strategic initiative, **'Korea Plus'** to facilitate Korean FDI and forge larger economic cooperation in pursuit of the Act Asia Policy.

Above moves is part of the strategy to downplay New Delhi's political and economic ties with North Korea while reinforcing its bond with Seoul and its allied countries. Containing North Korea is beneficial to India's economic and regional ambit in East Asia as well as its approach to the global nuclear nonproliferation regime as a responsible nuclear state.

Strong strategic and security ties:

- Since 2010, New Delhi and Seoul have regularly conducted joint naval exercises and had official talks on combating terrorism and nuclear proliferation. In every summit meeting over the last decade, both sides have promised stronger strategic and security ties to enhance regional stability through the expansion of defence deal.
- In response to the Special Strategic Partnership with South Korea in May 2015, New Delhi has agreed to get arms supplies from South Korea, a segment dominated by the US, Russia, Israel, France, and the UK.
- Since early 2017, India has pushed three defence deals forward with South Korea. Many
- New Delhi signed the MoU with Seoul for five joint fleet support ships worth $1.5 billion. India also invited South Korean corporation, Kangnam, for design consultation, and the technological assistance of 12 mine countermeasure vessels worth $5.5 billion.
- The latest deal between India's local defence-supplier, Larsen & Toubro, with Korean firm, Hanwha Techwin, over 100 self-propelled artillery guns worth $696 million made this bilateral relationship even more lucrative.

Globally, India-South Korea's growing ties reinforce the US-Japan-led multilateral security frame in the Asia-Pacific region, primarily designed to compete with China and North Korea.

Challenges:

- First, emerging political interests and motivations in Seoul and New Delhi still lag behind the regional and global demand.
- Most official talks are repetitive, confirming the significance of strategic partnerships heavily weighing on economic cooperation.
- Moderating the dissimilar style of diplomacy and communication under cultural differences is another challenge.

Thus, cultural and political differences could present a challenge to India and South Korea forging effective regional ties.

Conclusion:

Overall, the strategic ties between Seoul and New Delhi present promise for mutual interest as well as regional stability. It is a critical time for both countries to explore the topic, the scope of the possibility, and the limits of the bilateral cooperation in different time periods. The above mentioned shortcomings needs to be resolved soon.

Connecting the dots:

- The strategic ties between Seoul and New Delhi present promise for mutual interest as well as regional stability. In this light the two nations are mutually recalibrating their strategic ties. However, there are certain challenges that exists when it comes to dealing with each other. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *India and its International relations.*
- *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.*

"Quad"- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

In news:

The first formal talks among the members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or the "Quad") took place between Australia, India, Japan and the US in Manila, Philippines. The meeting was held on the sidelines of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

Discussions:

- The discussions focused on cooperation based on the members' converging vision and values for promotion of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.
- The officials agreed that a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large.
- Common challenges of terrorism and proliferation linkages impacting the region.
- Need to enhance connectivity.

Background:

The grouping's informal origins can be traced to 2004. In the wake of the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami, Australia, India, Japan and the US launched an ad-hoc humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) mission, which allowed them to come together operationally. Since then the four navies have worked together on several occasions. The Quad was formally initiated in 2007 at the prompting of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe.

Formal Quad meetings were not possible following strong objections from China in 2007. Since 2015, the India-US Malabar naval exercises have included Japan and are likely to include Australia in the next iteration, thus making the military component of the Quad a reality

Defining Indo-Pacific:

The term "Indo-Pacific" is used to define the stretch of water from the tropical Indian Ocean, through the equatorial seas around the Indonesian archipelago, the South China Sea, and to the western and central Pacific Ocean. Potential for conflict in the region is high because of the absence of a robust regional peace and security architecture.

Key drivers behind formally reviving the Quad:

Several factors why the countries chose to revivify the Quad at this juncture are:

- All the Quad countries have noted in different ways that China's rise has presented a serious challenge to a rules-based international order.

- For India, the Doklam confrontation with China and concerns over the latter's so-called Belt Road Initiative (BRI). There is a desire to engage Washington more closely in the region.
- For Australia, and to some extent Japan, the key driver is the concern about the commitment of the Donald Trump administration to the bilateral alliance arrangements.
- For the US, the Quad offers a way to share its burden of containing China.

Challenges:

The Quad's potential is likely to be limited by several internal differences.

- The three pillars of the Indo-Pacific architecture need to work in coordination- While the Quad is a crucial pillar of the peace and security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region, it needs to be supported by at least two other pillars. The EAS serves the role of the political pillar and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) as the trade and economic pillar. While all Quad participants are members of EAS, India is still not a member of APEC. This lacuna needs to be remedied.
- India may need to enter into formal military arrangements and cooperation, even though this might bring with it the prospect of being dragged into a war not of its making.

  As NATO has shown, sometimes a democratic military alliance is essential to maintain peace.
- Washington's indifference to the geopolitics of maritime South Asia. It may happen that Trump's promotion of a "free and open Indo-Pacific region" is more focused on trade, than maritime security.
- Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is showing a new enthusiasm for naval engagement with Beijing. With many South-East Asian states openly acknowledging China's role in regional security and development, it seems unlikely a proposal aimed at the containment of Chinese naval power in Asia will find much support.

Britain and France must not be included:

The resumption of the quadrilateral dialogue, is a good idea but there isn't much rationale for involving Britain and France at this stage.

- The two have islands and military facilities in the region, still they are extra-regional powers.
- The European powers are still too fixated on Russia (rather than China) as the primary security threat to be of much utility to their Asian partners.
- Moreover, the greater the number of people at the table, the narrower the agenda on which a consensus can be achieved.

Improved prospects for India:

- Facing a huge power deficit, India needs partnerships to balance China. New Delhi is rightly concerned about Beijing's use of its navy to normalize Chinese

- dominance of the littorals, a condition that supports Beijing's vision of a unipolar Asia. Many thinks that China's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean involves a "slow choke" of New Delhi's geopolitical influence in its strategic backyard.
- India's neighbours—as foreign secretary S. Jaishankar has pointed out—are bound to feel more reassured of India's (as against a rapacious China's) words if New Delhi has the economic, military and political backing of major powers in the region.
- The Quad has the potential to secure the region against great power conflict.

Conclusion:

To be truly effective, the Quad will have to ensure the continued engagement and commitment of Washington to the region. Effective coordination among the four countries is required if the grouping hopes to offer smaller states in the region reasons to value the rules-based order compared to China's competing vision.

Connecting the dots:

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or the "Quad") holds potential to establish a robust regional peace and security architecture for the Indo-Pacific region. However, the success of the grouping will depend on the cooperation among the member countries. Discuss.

Also read: Engaging big powers in South Asia
https://iasbaba.com/2017/11/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-6th-nov-2017/

TOPIC
General Studies 2:
- *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests*

ICJ seat and its importance to India's Diplomacy

In News:

India's Justice Dalveen Bhandari was re-elected to the International Court of Justice for a nine-year term, after Britain withdrew its candidate, Christopher Greenwood, from the race.

Why the victory is significant?

- Analysts say the election result was crucial for India to gauge the support it enjoys in the world body where New Delhi has been campaigning for reforms, including a permanent seat for itself in the powerful Security Council.

- The victory hints at a sign that the old global order is collapsing and a new one is on the anvil. (It was a contest between an old power, Great Britain, and an emerging one, India.)
- The voting in the General Assembly which overwhelmingly favours India is reflective of the new global order, which is not pleasant to the world powers.
- Britain's withdrawal signals the first time in 71 years that a U.K. judge will be absent in the UN court. It is also the first time a permanent member of the Security Council has lost to a non-permanent member for a seat at The Hague.
- The major diplomatic victory cements India's growing clout on the world stage.
- Justice Dalveen Bhandari presence ensures that India will continue to remain on the legal high table of the world at a time when several globally significant cases such as the one involving former Navy official Kulbhushan Jadhav against Pakistan is under way there.

Key facts:

- The ICJ, comprising 15 judges, was established in 1945 to settle legal disputes between nations in accordance with international law and is the principle legal body of the United Nations.
- Britain is the fifth permanent member of the Security Council. This would be the first time that Britain, a veto-empowered permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), wouldn't have any representation on the ICJ.
- The victory makes Dalveen Bhandari, the third Indian to secure a prominent position in a United Nations (UN) body in recent months.
- International law expert Neeru Chadha was elected to the UN body, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), in Hamburg in June. And last month, Soumya Swaminathan, director general of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), was appointed deputy director general for programmes at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva.
- Bhandari is the fourth Indian judge to be elected to the ICJ after B.N. Rau, Nagendra Singh and R.S. Pathak.

Central focus:

- India has been seeking that the democratic process need to be played its full course in both the Security Council and the General Assembly and there should not be an intervention or adoption of a process that has never been used before or the one that undermines the voice of the majority.
- "The extraordinary support from the UN membership is reflective of the respect for strong constitutional integrity of the Indian polity and the independence of the judiciary in India."

What is the ICJ?

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) started work in 1946, after half a century of international conflict in the form of two World Wars.
- The ICJ has its seat at The Hague, the Netherlands, and has the jurisdiction to settle disputes between countries and examine cases pertaining to violation of human rights according to the tenets of international law. It is the judicial arm of the United Nations.

How are judges elected?

- The ICJ has a total strength of 15 judges who are elected to nine-year terms of office.
- They are elected by members of the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council, where polling takes place simultaneously but independent of each other.
- In order to be elected, a candidate must have an absolute majority in both bodies, which often leads to much lobbying, and a number of rounds of voting.
- In order to ensure a sense of continuity, especially in pending cases, elections are conducted triennially for a third of the 15-member Court. Judges are eligible to stand for re-election.

How do member countries nominates judges?

- All states party to the Statute of the Court are eligible to propose candidates.
- The selection process is meant to be apolitical, and is made not by the government of the state concerned, but by the members of the Permanent Court of Arbitration designated by that state to represent its interests in the Court.
- Each group can propose a maximum of four candidates, not more than two of whom may be citizens of the said country.
- The other two nominees may be from any country, even those that are not party to the Statute.

On what basis are judges elected?

- It is held that all nominees should have a 'high moral character,' and credentials commensurate with those expected from the highest judicial officials of those countries.
- The Charter also makes it mandatory for judges to have recognised competence in international law.
- Every judge receives an annual base salary of $172,978, with the President receiving a supplementary allowance of $15,000.
- In order to keep the ICJ insulated from political influence, it is enshrined in the Charter that no judge can be dismissed, unless in the unanimous opinion of all peers, he is deemed to no longer fulfil the required conditions. However, this has never happened in the 72-year history of the ICJ.

Conclusion:

"The extraordinary support from the UN membership is reflective of the respect for strong constitutional integrity of the Indian polity and the independence of the judiciary in India."

The victory tells us that indeed a new India is emerging that is no longer risk-averse and is willing to fight it out openly. In this case, of course, the world witnessed how the rise and fall of powers continues to shape the global governance architecture.

Connecting the dots:
- India's International Court of Justice victory hints at a sign that the old global order is collapsing and a new one is on the anvil. Comment.

TOPIC
General studies 2:
- *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora*
- *Important International institutions*

Comparison of SAARC with ASEAN

Introduction:
Comparing SAARC with ASEAN we can notice that ASEAN is much more effective regional organization.
ASEAN is a good example for SAARC, particularly for India and Pakistan, to realise the value of cooperation and benefits resulting from a larger common market despite diversity in politics and religion.
(Below article compares and provides crucial inputs about the success formula of ASEAN and how ASEAN model can help SAARC to become an effective regional organization.)

History (Basics):
SAARC
- The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic and geopolitical organization of eight countries that are primarily located in South Asia or Indian subcontinent. The SAARC Secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- It came into being in 1985, with founding members Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Afghanistan joined in 2007.

ASEAN
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded in 1967.
- ASEAN started with founding members Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand; then added Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam in later years.

Same but Different: (Similarities and Differences)

(Case 1) Common concerns led to their foundations

When the ASEAN was founded in 1967, its members existed in a state of mutual suspicion and uncertainty. As new nation-states, its founding members were also concerned with protecting their sovereignty and political and economic development.

Nevertheless, over time, ASEAN developed informal diplomatic mechanisms to manage their bilateral tensions. While tensions continue to flare up between neighbours, ASEAN states appear to have successfully avoided the outbreak of armed conflict between states in the region.

Similarly, when the SAARC was founded in 1985, its founding members had long running disputes with each other. However, unlike ASEAN, SAARC's record at managing regional conflicts has not been as successful.

Both ASEAN and SAARC were set up because the members were involved in serious disputes. Perhaps ASEAN was more troubled because of its conglomeration of islands and unclear laws dealing with maritime frontiers. Yet, while ASEAN was able to avoid conflict, SAARC was not.

(Case 2) Trade and economic cooperation

ASEAN nations signed the treaty of amity and cooperation, adopted the principles of refraining or avoiding of threat or use of force and settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

The shared conviction of creating an economically win-win situation mobilised the nations in forming an interdependent regional economy. Therefore, since its inception, the ASEAN countries have become more integrated through enhanced intraregional trade and connectivity.

SAARC started its journey with similar aspirations but over time has failed to deliver. It has been unable to integrate the region through trade and connectivity and continues to be stuck in an awkward/complex mix-up of regional politics and rivalry and stagnates from historical distrust and old animosity.

(Case 3) Great potential but stalled projects

Association of Southeast Asian Nations ASEAN is among the world's largest regional intergovernmental organisations.

Trade in ASEAN has grown rapidly and it has focussed on promoting rapid economic growth and modernisation. It has created the Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA), which ensures liberalisation and protection of cross-border investments operations, together with best practices for the treatment of foreign investors and investments.

On the other hand, trade amongst the SAARC members stands at 3.5% of their total volume of trade. Initiatives under the South Asian Free Trade Association have failed to make much

headway. Subregional initiatives like the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreement also have stalled.

(Case 4) Travel and Connectivity

The Federation of ASEAN Travel Associations (FATA) has called on the ASEAN nations to waive entry requirements amongst the member states.

A feasibility study has been conducted on the development of a rail link from Singapore to Kunming in southern China to enhance seamless connectivity among the ASEAN nations to boost intraregional trade and people-to-people connectivity. Projects aimed at promoting the region as a tourist destination have also been undertaken.

On the other hand, the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme only allows certain categories of dignitaries to be exempt from visas, excluding ordinary citizens from accessing unimpeded travel in the region. It is difficult for Indians to enter Pakistan and vice versa. Even citizens of other SAARC countries who have visited either India or Pakistan before and now wish to travel to the other face hassles during visa issuance by either country. And SAARC infrastructural problems plague connectivity.

(Case 5) Domination of subregional initiatives

As the biggest country of SAARC, India is trying to exert leadership by forming subregional initiatives like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Another objective is to isolate Pakistan. Such attempts to forge sub-regional ties at the cost of jeopardising the regional vision for unity have not been witnessed in ASEAN.

When ASEAN was criticised for taking in Myanmar in spite of its military rule, the grouping emphasised the importance of keeping open the channels of communication and engagement as a better means to influence the regime. Bilateral arguments or disagreements never got in the way of trade and travel.

(Case 6) India and Pakistan

In its first two decades, ASEAN focussed on a limited range of issues, but over time its mandate expanded and now includes climate change, disaster management, counterterrorism, drugs and human trafficking.

ASEAN's greatest success has been its ability to deftly resolve disputes.

In the early years, for instance, its unity was challenged by the Philippines-Malaysia dispute over Sabah, but the founding members found a peaceful mechanism to mitigate opposing claims.

In the case of SAARC, political squabbles, deep mistrust and military conflict between India and Pakistan have frustrated regional cooperation. The whole region is suffering from lost potential due to India-Pakistan hostility which hit a new low when India boycotted the 19th SAARC summit as a result of the Uri terrorist attack, with Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Bhutan following suit, eventually resulting in cancellation of the summit.

(Case 7) Lack of broad regional vision

ASEAN members have avoided showing outward hostility against each other and have tried to resolve differences through dialogue, engagement and cooperation. Politicians in SAARC have mostly catered to their domestic constituents without having any broad regional vision, so that it takes years to sign agreements and even more time to implement them.

As a regional organisation, while ASEAN has grown from strength to strength. Unless there is a serious and concerted effort by the political leadership of SAARC, led primarily by India and Pakistan, to revitalise the regional body, it will continue to be what it always has been: a utopian idea existing only in summit documents.

The way ahead: (IASbaba's views)

With abundant natural resources and more than 1.5 billion people, SAARC has the potential to become the world's largest economy after the United States and China and is perceived as the next largest consumer market buoyed by steady economic growth and a booming middle class.

Yet, SAARC is failing to harvest the benefit with intra-SAARC trade of only 5%, compared to ASEAN's 32%, the EU's 50% and NAFTA's 65%.

From regional stability and security ASEAN has now moved to regional economic integration and cooperation which is another step of their success. Neither in terms of economic co-operation nor in terms of promotion of peace and understanding there have been no signs of regional co-operation in SAARC. Because of India and Pakistan's suspicion and mistrust of each other SAARC continues to stagnate and will never be as successful as ASEAN.

In simple words, the rivalry between India and Pakistan continues to frustrate efforts to integrate South Asia.

- To pave the way for SAARC's integration India-Pakistan rivalry has to stop and this calls for bold leadership.
- Given that India occupies 70% of the SAARC region, both geographically and economically, India has the onus to bring SAARC nations together.
- For SAARC to progress, it must first capitalise on less contentious issues. Short-term success will create the momentum to work on long-term goals of regional connectivity, resource sharing, and investment.
- A good start can be adopting a 'South Asia First' policy, making SAARC countries import products first from within the region. For example, major garment-manufacturing countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka import more than 80% of raw materials from outside SAARC, even though India and Pakistan are net exporters in this sector.

With the flow of multilateralism and regionalism ASEAN is going forward SAARC is still in same position and unsuccessful. SAARC member states should follow ASEAN as a model for regionalism and for the regional prospects and prosperity.

Connecting the dots:

- Can SAARC be next ASEAN? Discuss the initiatives to be taken by regional members and especially India for greater economic integration.
- SAARC member states should follow ASEAN as a model for regionalism and for the regional prospects and prosperity. Do you agree? Critically evaluate.

## TOPIC

General studies 2:
- *Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora*
- *India and the world, India and its neighbours*

Chabahar Port: crucial gateway for India and Afghan's objectives

For India's objectives, the port of Chabahar has become the crucial gateway to step up relations with Iran and Afghanistan.

In news:
- The much-awaited Chabahar route for Indo-Afghan trade, has finally taken off.
- The first shipment of wheat to Afghanistan left from Kandla port (India) and reached Chabahar port in Iran, and then through the land route (Zahedan-Zaranj-Kabul highway) via Iran into Afghanistan.

Link: http://lb.newsflicks.in/
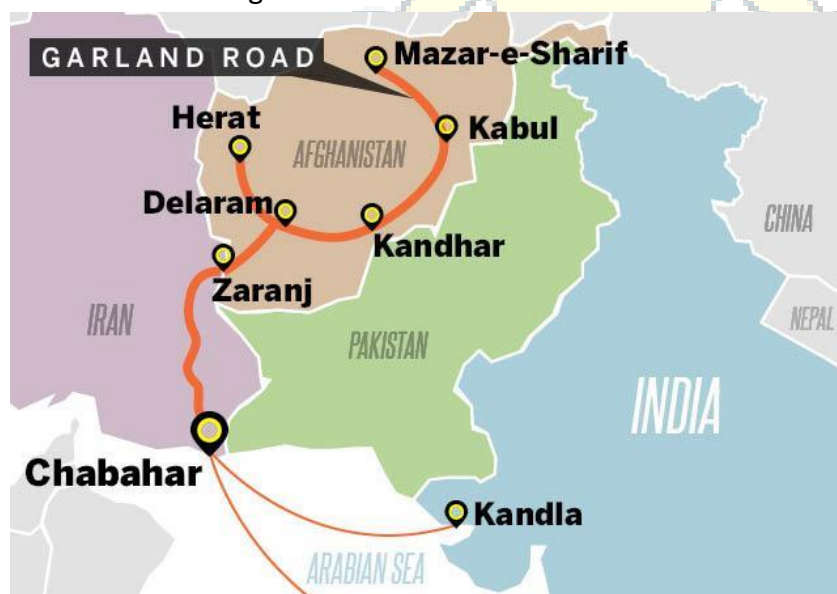
- This route is expected to propel the Indo-Afghan bilateral relationship into another level, besides strengthening the trilateral relationship between India, Afghanistan and Iran, and also increasing linkages between Kabul and Tehran.

About Chabahar Port
- Located on the Makran coast
- South-eastern coast of Iran
- It is relatively underdeveloped free trade and industrial zone (compared to the sprawling port of Bandar Abbas further west)
- It is located in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich Persian Gulf nation's southern coast.
- It lies outside the Persian Gulf and is easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing Pakistan.

Importance of activation of Chabahar port and the Zahedan-Zaranj-Kabul highway
- As discussed above, it will propel Indo-Afghan bilateral relationship into another level.
- It will strengthen the trilateral relationship between India, Afghanistan and Iran.
- It will help increase Afghanistan as a transit for Central Asian countries into the Arabian Sea.
- The route reduces Kabul's dependence on Islamabad, especially over the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade agreement. In other words, Afghanistan would no longer depend on Pakistan for its transit trade with India and other countries with the opening of the strategic Chabahar Port.
- This would also help change the nature of Afghanistan's relations both with Pakistan and Iran. For Afghanistan, Chabahar provides an additional leverage in dealing with Pakistan.
- For India, it is the nearest port to India on the Iranian coast, which provides access Chabahar to the resources and markets of Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- The strategic location makes it ideal for keeping track of Chinese or Pakistani military activity based out of Gwadar.
- For Afghanistan, Chabahar is faster and easier, when compared to the tough terrain across the Durand Line.

Chabahar and the India-Iran-Afghanistan Trilaterals

The activation of Chabahar for Indian goods into Afghanistan means the following.

First, it fulfills an Indian promise of an alternative route for Afghanistan. The idea of Chabahar was born when Pakistan refused for transit facilities to India.

Second, the activation of Chabahar also fulfils another promise – to Tehran. India has been ridiculed for making promises and not following them up — Chabahar in the West and Sittwe in the east. The Chabahar opening should change that perception.

Third, Chabahar also speaks for India's commitment to improving Indo-Iran relations. There were apprehensions about India moving closer to the US, and Indo-Iran relations becoming hostage to it. It appears New Delhi has been able to withstand American pressure and move ahead with Iran.

Fourth, Chabahar port will also improve Afghan-Iran partnership and provide a crucial leverage for Kabul, as a transit between Central Asia and the Arabian Sea. It could further link Russia and provide another warm water outlet for Moscow.

Perhaps, for the Afghans, Chabahar is not just about Indo-Afghan trade; it is an opening of a huge new world!

But, the most important aspect of Chabahar for Kabul is the confidence that the new axis provides in dealing with Pakistan, especially over transit trade.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the strategic significance of Chabahar port for India. Also discuss the significance it hold for India-Iran-Afghanistan Trilaterals economically and geo-strategically?
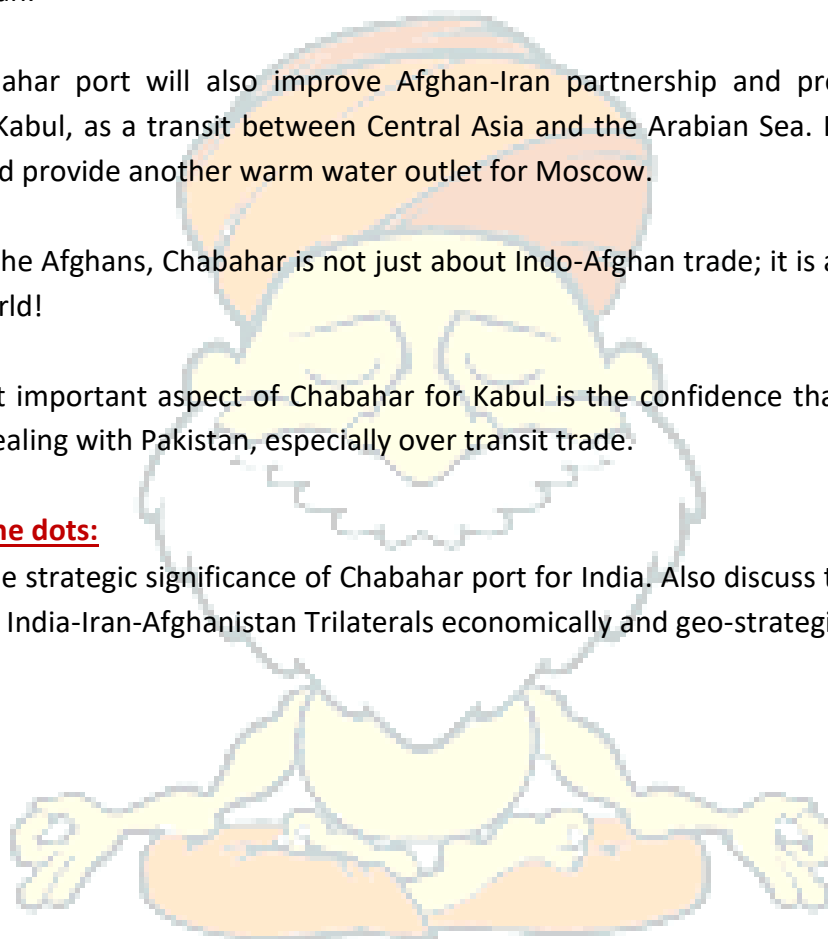
ECONOMY

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*

General Studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

Improved World Bank's Doing Business (DB) rankings for India

In news:

The World Bank's Doing Business (DB) rankings for 2018 have just come out and India has made a very significant jump, improving its rank from 130th in 2017 to 100th. Not only has India improved its position in terms of rankings, which is relative, it has also made improvement in absolute terms, measured by the so-called "distance to frontier" metric.

Even though the DB rankings may not be the sole determinant for attracting investment, the improvement is likely to boost investor confidence as it reflects the government's commitment to reforms.

Areas based on:

The World Bank's rankings are based on the country's performance in following areas:

- Starting a business.
- Dealing with construction permits.
- Getting electricity
- Registering property.
- Getting credit.
- Protecting minority investors.
- Paying taxes.
- Trading across borders.
- Enforcing contracts; and
- Resolving insolvency.

Measures taken by the government:

The improvement in rankings is the result of coordinated efforts made by the government over the past few years. According to the World Bank, India has adopted 37 reforms since 2003 and about half of them have been implemented in the last four years. The four parameters where there has been a quantum jump in rankings —resolving insolvency,

paying taxes, access to credit and protecting minority investors — have all seen focussed efforts from the Centre both in terms of policymaking and in implementation.

- "Make in India" program.
- Simplification of tax procedures.
- Bankruptcy laws and so on.
- The rise in the insolvency ranking is directly attributable to the enactment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. The implementation of the bankruptcy code is a big boost, as it will help inefficient firms exit the market and improve overall allocation of capital.
- Access to credit has been facilitated by the licensing of new entities such as small finance banks and payments bank, not to forget the MUDRA scheme.
- One indicator that deserves special mention is the protection of minority investors. India is at the fourth position globally in this category. This is a huge achievement and the government and the securities market regulator deserve credit. The Securities and Exchange Board of India is constantly working to enhance investor confidence. Implementation of the recommendations made by the Uday Kotak committee on corporate governance will further augment minority shareholder confidence in the market.
- The DBP 2018 says: "India made dealing with construction permits less cumbersome by implementing an online system that has streamlined the process at the Municipality of New Delhi and Municipality of Greater Mumbai. The online system has streamlined the process of obtaining a building permit, thereby reducing the number of procedures and time required to obtain a building permit in India.
- On enforcing contracts- India made enforcing contracts easier by introducing the National Judicial Data Grid, which makes it possible to generate case measurement reports on local courts.
- Some of the biggest hurdles that businesses face such as in registering property or securing construction permits fall under the realm of States. While the Centre's ranking of States on ease of doing business has exerted some pressure, what's encouraging is that States themselves are undertaking reforms as they compete for investment.

Way ahead: While the government deserves credit for this impressive improvement in the DB rankings, it should not lose sight of the distance India still needs to cover. For instance, despite all the effort, India's rank in dealing with construction permits is 181 among 190 countries. The time taken for enforcing a contract has, in fact, worsened from what it was 15 years ago. Consequently, India's rank in this category is a poor 164.

- Rather than depending only on the DB report, the government should understand the de facto situation faced by firms that wanted improvements in the country's business environment.

  In reality, these reports do not provide an accurate picture of a country's business

environment. The de jure rules of business that are captured by the DB reports and the de facto reality differ significantly.

- In order to undertake effective policies to improve the business environment in India, we need to understand what causes it to be relatively good in some situations and poor in   others.
  A recently concluded NITI Aayog-IDFC study throws light on some of the broad trends in the country's business environment, but fails to provide a deeper understanding of its causes due to the lack of a conceptual framework to analyse the data.
- Policymakers should build on recent gains with an accelerated pace of reforms in areas such as land, labour and contract enforcement, which will help push investment and growth in the medium to long run.
- The World Bank report flags the areas where the country lags - local entrepreneurs need to go through 12 procedures to start a business in India's commercial capital, which is way higher than many high-income economies, besides cumbersome procedures for construction permits, registration of property and enforcement of contracts.
- To improve the score related to registering property we need measures like updating and digitising land records, improving titling and streamlining procedures on transfer of property.
- The kind of challenges that policymakers need to address includes- Lack of awareness related to the single-window facility for setting up a business. Labour- intensive sectors are constrained by labour market regulations. Finding skilled workers and dismissing employees are severe impediments. Firms still face power shortages.
- The implementation of the goods and services tax (GST) has not been accounted for in this year's rankings. Therefore, if the problems associated with GST are addressed quickly, it is likely that the GST will help boost India's ranking further next year.

Conclusion:

With its demographics, the size of the economy and a well-functioning capital market, India stands a real chance of projecting itself as a preferred destination for investments. The fact that China is likely to slow down further in coming years will also help India's case. Clearly, the more difficult reforms lie ahead with the low hanging fruit, mainly those within the ambit of the Centre, already plucked. The process of improvement has to be continuous and there can be no let up. Both the Central and state governments will need to work in a number of areas to improve India's competitiveness.

Connecting the dots:

- While the government deserves credit for the impressive improvement in the Doing Business rankings for 2018, it should not lose sight of the distance India still needs to cover.

Also read: "Ease of doing business" rankings: Critical analysis
https://iasbaba.com/2017/10/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-25th-oct-2017/

TOPIC:
General Studies 3:
- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*

General Studies 2:
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

Focusing on tourism sector for job growth

Case study:

Quentin Jeremy Clerc and Marie Droz came to India to explore its rich history and partake of its storied culture. On October 22 what the Swiss couple experienced instead was the country's dark underbelly. While on a visit to Fatehpur Sikri, near Agra, they were stalked, harassed and later, assaulted with sticks and stones by a group of locals. The unprovoked attack left Clerc with a fractured skull and Droz, a broken arm. Both of them want to leave India as quickly as possible.

Increasing crimes:

Media reports quoting home ministry data suggest that in 2014 there were 113 incidents of crime against foreign tourists in New Delhi alone. In 2015 it was higher, at 135. Such developments hurt India's image and raise questions about our culture which teaches us to treat guests as God — Atithi Devo Bhava.

Leveraging tourism for economic development:

We are yet to fully recognise the role tourism plays in economic development and more so, in job creation. The government is yet to leverage tourism's full potential and inculcating its benefits among the nation's collective consciousness.

Jobless growth:

A million youngsters attain working age every month and as many as 100 million jobs need to be created between now and 2025 to avoid what experts are increasingly warning us about — a demographic catastrophe. The reasons being: lack of low-skilled job opportunities outside of agriculture even as skills mismatch and automation hurt the formal sector.

Battling 'jobless growth', the government has chosen to focus on the employment guarantee scheme in rural India (allocation for MGNREGA has risen by 40 per cent between 2015 and 2018) and other flagship programmes elsewhere across the country such as 'Make in India', 'Startup India' and a fillip to affordable housing in the last three years.

Tourism as a solution:

Tourism offers the perfect solution.

- For every 30 tourists one core tourism job gets created which then helps add another 1.5 jobs in related sectors.
- A good portion of the jobs that get generated are low-skilled, for women and for first-time workers — the type of job opportunities that India presently needs.
- The sector also has the potential to create micro-entrepreneurs who in turn can employ more people. The multiplier effect it delivers is high.

Global example:

In fact, tourism helped Spain which receives over 68 million international tourists annually (India, in comparison, gets 8.80 million visitors) fight its recent economic downturn. Understandably, the sector accounts for 5.8 per cent of Spain's GDP as against India's 2 per cent. According to the World Tourism Organisation, the sector provides for 10 per cent of the world's GDP, 7 per cent of the global trade and creates one in every 11 jobs worldwide. In 2015 tourism created 107 million jobs worldwide and supported 284 million other jobs. The International Labour Organisation estimates these numbers will grow to 136 million and 370 million respectively by 2026. Policymakers need to get their act together now if India has to corner a fair share of these jobs.

Way ahead:

As per the rankings of World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, the Government need to focus on the not-so-good performance in following parameters:

- The country ranks a low 103 on presence of an enabling environment for tourism (even Rwanda, Iran and Algeria outrank us).
- It is 104 when it comes to how actively the Government promotes the sector.
- With regard to safety and security the performance is a low 114 (we have Colombia, Yemen, Nigeria, Lebanon and Pakistan for company). In health and hygiene, we are ranked 104 and in environment sustainability 134 (only Kuwait and Yemen are below us).

Conclusion:

It is time the Government gives the same importance to the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report as it does to the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings. For the record, India jumped 12 places to rank 40th among 136 countries in the 2017 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness rankings (Spain topped the chart).

Connecting the dots:
- A robust tourism sector can help overcome the challenge of job-less growth in India. Discuss. Also elaborate on reforms required in this regard.

TOPIC:
General Studies 3

- *Economic Development – Indian Economy and Issues relating to growth and development – Different indicators used to measure growth*

Social Progress Index: An index import for balanced development

Is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) an adequate measure of a country's development across many dimensions?

- The GDP calculation focusses exclusively on economic growth.
- Even while focusing on economic growth, it does not capture the level of inequity which can exist in a society despite overall economic growth. The inequity can in fact even be exacerbated by it.
- It pays no attention to the social and environmental measures of development which are as important as economic development.
- The most significant weakness of GDP is its exclusion of voluntary market transactions. GDP as a measure of economic growth fails to account for productive non-market activities, like a mother taking care of her child, a homemaker doing household chores, a homeowner doing maintenance of his house, leisure (paid vacation, holidays, leave time), improvement in product quality, etc.
- GDP also ignores important factors like environment, happiness, community, fairness and justice.

Alternate measures and their limitations:

Several alternative measures have been proposed to capture the social dimension of development, combined with or independent of economic indices.

- **Gross National Happiness**, which was introduced in the 1970s by the king of Bhutan, measures the happiness levels of the citizens in a country while it ignores other important elements like gender equality, quality education and good infrastructure.
- A World Happiness Report is now periodically published from the Columbia University which compares self-reported levels of happiness of people from different countries.
- A composite **Wellness Index** was proposed by noted economists Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, for a measure of development that looks beyond GDP.
- A Global **Multidimensional Poverty Index** was developed at Oxford to gauge inequity within and across societies.
- **GINI coefficient** which was introduced in 1912 by Corrado Gini and adopted by World Bank, and measures the income inequality among a country's citizens — fails to measure social benefits or interventions that reduce the gap or inequality between rich and poor.
- **Human Development Index**, devised and launched in 1990 by Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, is computed and published by the United Nations Development Programme and overcomes most of the shortcomings of the Gini coefficient and GNH.

However, HDI, as a measure, falls short in its capture of the unequal distribution of wealth within the country and the level of infrastructural development. Many prospects of a healthy society, such as environmental sustainability and personal rights, are not included in HDI.

The need of Social Progress Index:

- An index of social progress is needed which do not try to displace GDP but has additive value.
- Such an index can be used to remind political leaders that their vision must accommodate both economic and social progress as being important for a country, recognising, of course, that these two tracks are closely interlinked and sometimes inseparable.

About SPI:

The SPI was launched in 2013 and is based on 52 indicators of countries' social and environmental performance. It includes no economic indicators and measures outcomes. it has been created by a group of academics and institutions constituting the Social Progress Imperative (www.socialprogressimperative.org).

This index has three major domains:

1) Basic Human Needs.

2) Foundations of Wellbeing.

3) Opportunity.

Each of these has several clusters of specific indicators (as shown below).

SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX INDICATORS

Pic credit: https://www.slideshare.net/socprog/20130411-skoll-world-forum-panel-final
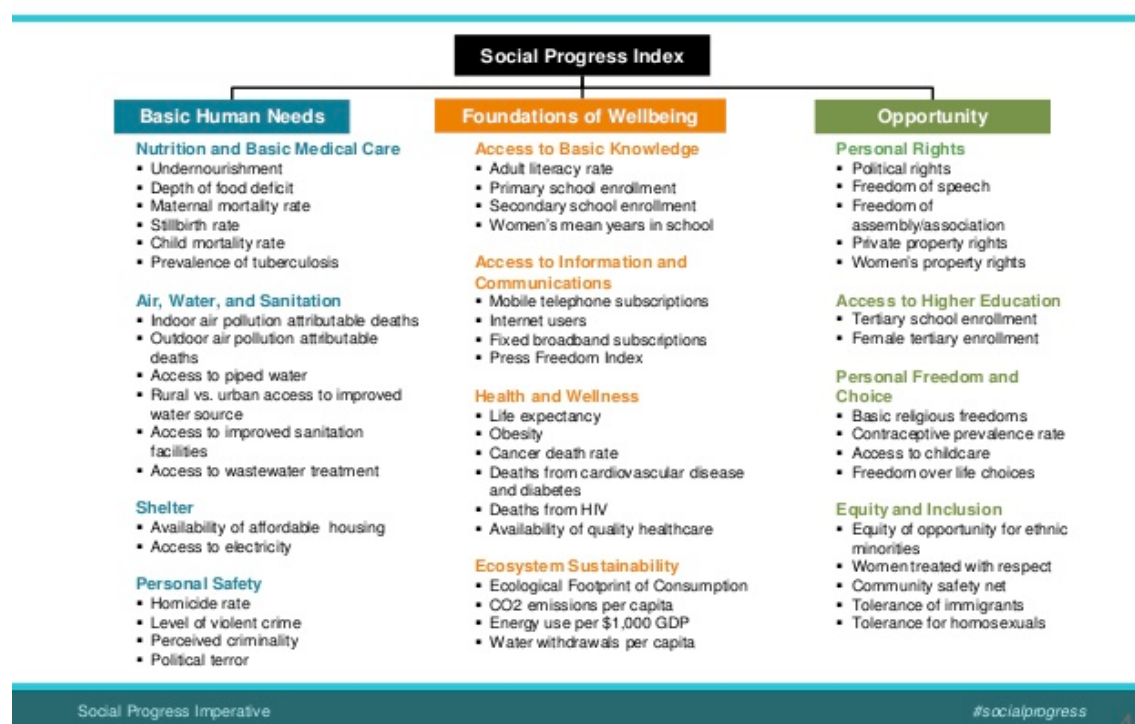
Pros of SPI:
- The index offers a new tool to explore the complex two-way relationship between economic and social progress.
- It provides a metric for comparison of countries, and States within a country.
- The SPI indicators can serve as a checklist to monitor our progress over time in each of the important areas of human welfare.

State level:
The study (2005-2016) helps analyze whether States, especially using social and environmental indicators, are heading in the right direction. It is also essential to help adjust policies as well as public and private investments.
States can be ranked using social and environmental indicators on the basis of:
- Their capability to provide for basic needs such as shelter, water, and sanitation.
- A foundation for well-being with education, health, and communication facilities.
- Analysing the prejudices that prevail in a region prohibiting people from making their personal decisions; and
- Evaluating whether citizens have personal rights and freedom or whether they are susceptible to child labour, human trafficking, corruption, etc.

Major findings of the Social Progress report, 2017:
- The overall social progress score for the country now stands at 57.03 (on a 0-100 scale), approximately eight points higher than in 2005.
- The country performs better in the provision of basic human needs rather than opportunities for its citizens. Therefore, creation of a society with equal opportunities for all still remains an elusive dream.
- The scores for opportunity have increased over the years followed by smaller, but important improvements in the areas of basic human needs and foundations of well-being.
- All the States have climbed the social progress ladder, with the group of States that had the worst performance in 2005 — Tripura, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Bihar — now showing improvement. This suggests that States with a relatively low level of social progress can improve rapidly.
- The greatest improvements have been in areas where social progress most often accompanies economic prosperity. On the other hand, areas where performance has declined or stagnated is where the correlation with economic development is weak. For instance, "Access to Information & Communication and Inclusion" depicts a strong relationship with per capita GDP and are the ones that have improved the most over the years. And "Health and Wellness & Environmental Quality", that are least correlated with economic development, have eroded.

- One significant difference between GDP and SPI is that SPI focusses on outcomes rather than inputs that are used in GDP. For example, the quality of life and longevity are measured instead of spending on health care, and people's experience of discrimination is looked at instead of focussing on whether there is a law against discrimination. SPI also reframes the fundamentals about development by taking into consideration not just GDP but also inclusive, sustainable growth that will lead to a significant improvement in people's lives. SPI can best be described as a complementary index to GDP and can be used along with GDP to achieve social progress.

Policies need to target social issues directly:
- The States should focus on policies that target social issues. The focus on economic parameters will result in unbalanced social development.
- The overall findings show that while the economy is on the right track, there is an urgent need to identify and focus on social parameters. The reliance on the idea that economic development will automatically transform social conditions will hamper further improvements in social progress. Social progress needs to be stimulated by focusing on policies directly targeting social issues.

Summary:
In conclusion, SPI can bring substantial betterment in the policy discourse on development. With the move to getting it introduced at a sub-national level, the index is expected to help development practitioners and other stakeholders in analysing well-being in a better manner.

Focusing exclusively on GDP implies measuring progress in purely monetary terms and failing to consider the wider picture of the real things that matter to real people. GDP isn't bad but it's not the whole story, alongside economic growth social progress is more important for policymaking. Even as India commits itself to move on the fast track of economic growth, it must be mindful of the need to invest in improving its social indicators as well

GOVERNANCE

General Studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes*

The Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G): An analysis

Background:

The momentum and scale of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) is unprecedented. Since the launch of the programme by the prime minister in October 2014, there has been an astonishing acceleration in the construction of toilets, with five crore built in three years.

Issues:

Technical realities and what people know:

- The preference for septic tanks remains deeply rooted and widespread. People believe they are better than the recommended more sustainable and economic twin pits because they are big and will take longer to fill, and, used sparingly, may even never have to be emptied. Due to widespread ignorance of technical details, many septic tanks are not built according to the guidelines, and end up contaminating the environment and damaging public health.

- New technology: Twin leach pits are much better. Human waste flows to the first pit. Once full, it is left to become manure while new waste is diverted into a second pit. The first pit is emptied and the cycle starts again. This technology allows time for the waste to compost and become harmless, odourless and valuable fertiliser. However, rapid investigations found many people who had had twin pits constructed for them without any explanation of how they work. They lacked a sense of ownership and believed the pits would fill up fast. In consequence, they were using them only some of the time, continuing open defecation (OD) even in villages with 100 per cent toilet coverage.

- This problem is acutely urgent. A recent rapid survey covering over a thousand households found that the proportion of twin pits being built in SBM is declining, and more and more unsustainable single leach pits are being built, especially among Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Solution: The solution is to empower people through knowledge. Few rural people are aware of technical details or convinced by the advantages of twin pits. Mason training can help, but the major thrust needed is a massive communication campaign to inform all villagers of the technical options and details, what they are entitled to demand in quality and quantity of materials, and how to ensure masons do a full job, so that they are never be short-changed with single pits or substandard construction.

Water availability:

A major issue especially in drier areas. Women are the main fetchers of water and cleaners of toilets. One flush of a toilet takes many times more water than does the lota for cleansing when defecating in the open.

Gender plays a part too: Men are the main open defecators. There can be a macho element, a preference for the open air, and an element of chivalry. This is reinforced by conventional campaigns which stress women's dignity and needs: Men are considerate if they leave the toilets to women, so also minimising water use and the rate at which the pit will fill.

Challenges beyond ODF:

- Children's poor, handwashing.
- Rural faecal sludge management.
- Solid and liquid waste management.
- Toilets that need upgrading.

Way ahead:

- SBM-G verifications and several studies indicate that in practice 70-90 per cent coverage is often taken as acceptable for a declaration of open defecation free (ODF). There should be definite evidence on thresholds for coverage and use.
- Often those without toilets are predominantly the marginalised and disadvantaged — OBC, SC, ST, the very poor, sick, disabled, aged and weak, or living in difficult or remote areas. For them, additional efforts and special policies and provisions are needed.
- One rapid study discovered effective ways of changing men's behaviour — groups of older women influencing men to adopt toilets when they go for OD. The study suggests that similar gentle and positive approaches should be promoted.
- Rapid learning, sharing and adapting will be vital. f acted on effectively, it will speed progress and enhance sustainability.

Conclusion:

The scale and complexity facing the SBM-G make it more challenging than any other rural development programme in the world. The scale of the achievements and milestones passed over the past three years far surpass anything we believed conceivably possible.

Driven forward with impressive leadership and dynamism, shortcomings are inevitable and rapid learning and adjustments vital and imperative for sustainable success.

Connecting the dots:

- The momentum and scale of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) is unprecedented. Discuss the achievements and further challenges faced by the programme.

TOPIC
General Studies 2:

- *Role of civil services in a democracy.*
- *Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.*

Solving the issue of "Criminalisation of Politics"

In news:
Recently, the Supreme Court asked the government about the status of criminal cases pending against elected ministers, underlining the issue of law-breakers becoming law-makers.
The Supreme Court recommended setting up fast-track courts to deal with the cases.

Criminalization of politics:
Criminalization refers to the use of criminal activities by politicians; either by direct malfeasance or by indirectly recruiting someone.
It is not a new phenomenon; the first instances of "booth-capturing" were reported in 1957, and involved hired goons who would mobilize or suppress turnout, or vote on behalf of disenfranchised voters.
In return for their work, politicians would protect these criminals from prosecution. From such petty engagement with elections, *goondas* and gangs have come a long way to contest elections themselves.

Why political parties chose to field such criminals?
Despite the risk that criminality of the candidates could have brought bad press. The corporate financing of elections was banned in 1969. This eliminated the most important legal source of campaign finance and pushed financing underground. At the same time, the costs of contesting elections kept increasing due to a rising population, increasing political competition—the number of political parties increased from 55 in the 1952 general election to 464 in 2014—and the trend of giving freebies for votes. This led parties to a competitive search for underground financing, and they played into the hands of criminals and

racketeers who had the means to acquire and dispose of large amounts of cash without detection.

Thus, parties fielded tainted candidates because they could contest an election without becoming a burden on the party's limited coffers. Data from the last three general elections shows that the strategy was an electoral success as candidates with **criminal cases were three times more likely to win than a "clean" candidate**.

Why a candidate with criminal background is more likely to win?

The reason lies in the **country's poor governance capacity**. On the one hand, India has excessive procedures that allow the bureaucracy to insert itself in the ordinary life of people; on the other hand, it appears woefully understaffed to perform its most crucial functions.

- The density of allopathic doctors, nurses and midwives is 11.9% per 10,000 residents in India (2014), at half of the benchmark set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Furthermore, the density is ten times larger in urban areas than villages.
- Despite internal security concerns—from Maoist violence to religious extremism and organized crime—there is a 30% shortfall in personnel of the Intelligence Bureau.
- India has the lowest number of police officers per capita—122.5 per 100,000 people—of any G20 member state, and the vacancy rate stands at 25%. Vacancy rates are 37% for high courts and 25% for local courts.

This **scarcity of state capacity** is the reason for the public preferring 'strongmen' who can employ the required pulls and triggers to get things done—someone who can enforce contracts, deal with the police when they get into trouble, handle the government babus while procuring a licence or help get admission to a government hospital for treatment. Criminality, far from deterring voters, encourages them because it signals that the candidate is capable of fulfilling his promises and securing the interests of the constituency.

Reforms required:

Fast-track courts are necessary because politicians are able to delay the judicial process and serve for decades before prosecution. But it is obvious that this will do little to break down the symbiotic relationship between politicians and criminals on the one hand, and the dependence of voters on strongmen. The reform needs to change the incentives for both politicians and voters.

- Bringing greater transparency in campaign financing will make it less attractive for political parties to involve gangsters. Either the Election Commission of India (ECI) should have the power to audit the financial accounts of political parties, or political parties' finances should be brought under the right to information (RTI) law.
- Broader governance will have to improve for voters to reduce the reliance on criminal politicians.

  That requires a rationalization of bureaucratic procedures and an increase in state

capacity to deliver essential public goods like security of life and contracts, and access to public utilities.

Conclusion:
Standing alone, fast-track courts for politicians will be ineffective in cleansing Indian politics. An effective strategy to tackle criminalization of politics should include reforms to improve governance and bring transparency in campaign financing.

Connecting the dots:
- Discuss the reasons behind criminalization of politics and the reforms required to resolve the issue
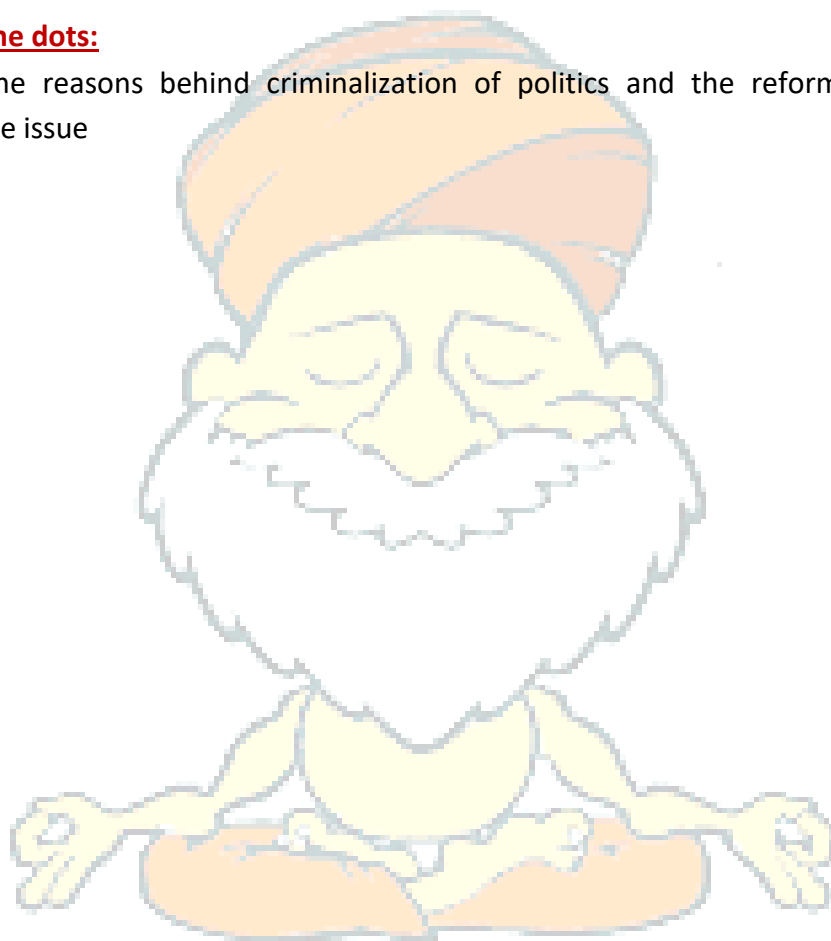
SECURITY

Reforming Indian Police Service

Background:

Two separate but similar tales of horrific murders of school-going children. Common to both incidents is the widespread public outrage that they rightly aroused, the serious charges of incompetence and complicity against the respective local police, and the dramatic twist in the two investigations that came about after the cases were handed over to the CBI.

Case study 1:

On July 6, 2017, the body of a 16-year-old girl was found in the forest near Kotkhai, a town approximately 80 km from Shimla. Rape and murder were evident from the scene. The Himachal Police constituted an SIT. In less than three days, the SIT claimed to have cracked the case and arrested six accused. However, widespread public anger forced the state government to transfer the case to the CBI. The CBI took up the investigation and within a few days ended up arresting two senior members of the SIT, including the then IG Shimla, a senior IPS officer. While the CBI too has not been able to solve the rape and murder case, their investigation suggests a tale of shocking police brutality and criminality, sheer insensitivity, and outright incompetence.

Case study 2:

On September 8, 2017, seven-year-old Pradyuman Thakur was found murdered in the toilet of the Ryan International School in Gurugram. A few days later, Gurugram Police claimed to have solved the case and arrested a school bus conductor named Ashok Kumar and also recovered a knife that was allegedly used in the attack. On September 22, the CBI took over the case. On November 8, the CBI claimed to have solved the case with the arrest of a Class 11 student of the same school for this gruesome murder.

The two cases are yet to be finalised and much work remains to be done in both investigations.

Troubling questions being raised:
- Why would the police falsely implicate innocent people? Even if they were not able to identify the guilty correctly, why couldn't they establish the innocence of those wrongly accused?
- During the initial investigation, at what level of the police hierarchy was the available evidence analysed and conclusions drawn?
- What was the role of the media? Was there external pressure to take shortcuts and conclude the investigations?
- What can be done to ensure that an Ashok Kumar or a Suraj Singh are not falsely accused of murder and suffer dishonour or worse, torture and death, allegedly at the hands of the police during the investigation itself?

Need of reform:
A handful of conscientious officers apart, there is general entropy in the professionalism and social skills of IPS brass leading the Police forces. The IPS is therefore in urgent need of reform to ensure effective policing.
The elitist feeling among the IPS is at the root of the ailing police system. This makes it difficult for them to comprehend ground realities and prevents them from becoming leaders rather than managers. Their aim remains to contain political fallout and focus on managing politicians, leaving day-to-day work to lower functionaries. Common people are rarely the focus.

Restraining media pressure:
Succumbing to media pressure and the desire to become instant heroes in the public eye by quickly "solving" cases is an ill-tendency. When the media and the public are seeking instant answers in sensational cases, it takes leadership to step up to the limelight and resist the pressure for instant answers. There are no instant answers in heinous offences. It takes courage to acknowledge that publicly.

Way forward:
Political interference and non-implementation of police reforms are blamed for all the ills of the police system. While that may be true to some extent, police leadership must take initiative to implement measures within their realm of authority.
- The IPS leadership must take steps to change the perception of police from exploiters to facilitators so that the public stops despising and making fun of them. They need to transform the character of police to that of "service" as opposed to "force".
- Proactive crime prevention and follow-up investigation has to be the priority in order to ensure reduction in crime and improvement in the conviction rate.

- Modernisation should focus on training and other aspects of human resource management, apart from incorporating modern investigative practices and forensics rather than simply acquiring vehicles and computers.
- A total overhaul of the recruitment system is the need of the hour. The aim of direct recruitment to the IP (Imperial Police) was to perpetuate the British rule and not for any higher purpose of ensuring impartiality. Having qualified in a fiercely competitive exam, IPS officers are mostly chair-bound. They must develop an eye for detail and become proficient in matters of policing to be able to properly guide their subordinates. An alternative method of recruitment could be on lines similar to that of Defence Services Officers through an institution similar to NDA immediately after qualifying class 12 and being put through rigorous academic, social skills and professional training through a four-year training programme.
- Curriculum should be focused on practical aspects and social skills.
- Policing in states is also adversely affected due to the irrational deputation policy. Policymakers therefore need to seriously review the existing deputation policy to ensure that all officers obtain at least 15 years of core policing experience at the district level.
- A methodology to link promotion to performance at every level must be devised.

Other areas that needs fixing:
- The chronic under-investment and under- staffing.
- The relentless political interference.
- The unconscionable delay in implementing the 11-year-old SC judgement on police reforms.

Conclusion:
Effective policing is the first step towards creating a safe, crime-free, and just society. The police leadership has an extremely important role to play in ensuring this aim. It is therefore essential that the police leadership consist only of the most suitable and conscientious officers. Urgent reforms in selection and training of IPS officers is therefore the need of the hour.

Connecting the dots:
- Effective policing is the first step towards creating a safe, crime-free, and just society. However, the Indian policing system is facing various issues. Discuss these issues and reforms to be taken.

Also read: https://iasbaba.com/2016/11/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-28th-november-2016/
Police Reforms in India

General Studies 2:
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

General Studies 3:
- *Mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment*
- *Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.*

Boosting India's military capabilities

Background:

The meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the Asean summit in Manila produced a significant resolution – that two of the world's great democracies should also have the world's greatest militaries. The meeting highlighted the shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region and pledged to enhance bilateral defence cooperation. Trump would like nothing better than to sell more American military equipment to India. This would not only be a geostrategic move to shore up India's military capabilities vis à vis China but also help create American jobs.

Poor indigenous defence production- A major challenge: While India's security challenges have multiplied from terrorism to low-intensity conflict to being prepared for a two-front war, its armed forces continue to face the issue of sub-optimal weapons platforms. A key reason for this is the inability to boost indigenous defence production. Indigenous projects are afflicted by inordinate delays, which usually make the finished product out of date.

Examples:
- While the indigenous Tejas light combat aircraft is yet to become combat ready after being in the making for over three decades, the Arjun main battle tank has proved to be too heavy in operational deployment and suffers from poor serviceability.
- The air force is grappling with just 33 fighter squadrons when 42 are needed to counter the threat perception from China and Pakistan.
- Several squadrons of ageing Russian fighters are set to retire. At the same time acquisition of foreign weapons platforms is expensive.

Such shortcomings hamper the combat-readiness of our armed forces.

Way out:
- Facilitate greater private sector participation in the defence industry.
- Establishing an American-style military-industrial complex that significantly reduces the time between research and field deployment.

The defence ministry has finalised the strategic partnership policy earlier this year. The policy envisages Indian private companies producing cutting-edge weapons through joint ventures with foreign partners. This is where American defence manufacturers can help.

Connecting the dots:

- Boosting India's military capabilities is the need of the hour. America's support in this regard should be taken with caution. Critically analyze.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:

- *Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.*
- *Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.*

Revamping Security Architecture of India

Background:
Terrorism continues to pose the greatest threat to the internal security of the country. According to the US Country Reports on Terrorism 2016, India is the third most affected country after Iraq and Afghanistan in the number of attacks perpetrated on its soil. It is estimated that a total of 52 terrorist groups are active in different parts of India, which is higher than in any other country. Fortunately, there has been no major terrorist attack in the country after 26/11 (2008). But it is not so that we are better prepared now and our law enforcement agencies have been able to prevent such an onslaught.

Half-hearted Measures taken in the wake of 26/11:

- National Security Guard units were decentralised.
- An elaborate coastal security scheme was drawn up.
- The National Investigation Agency established.

Issues with internal security:

- The police, who are the first responders to any terrorist crime, continue to be in shambles. The states have done very little to reform, rejuvenate or reinforce the capabilities of the police forces. The Supreme Court's directions of 2006 have been treated with contempt.
- The modernisation of police has suffered a setback following the 14th Finance Commission's recommendations and increase in the share of states' revenues, as the Centre delegated the responsibility to the state governments.

- The Government of India recently approved a Rs 25,000 crore scheme to strengthen the law and order apparatus. It will have to be ensured that money is utilised for the purpose for which it has been sanctioned.
- The Central armed police forces are not in the best health. There is discontent, particularly in the BSF and CRPF, over the quality of leadership at different levels, promotional opportunities, irrational deployments, inadequate infrastructure in insurgency-affected states and aspects of service conditions.
- Intelligence at the state level is not robust.
- Implementation of the coastal security scheme has not been effective.
- The National Counter Terrorism Centre is still not in existence.
- The "SMART" police conceptualised by the prime minister is nowhere to be seen, because of the indifference of the state governments.

Internal security has remained a grey area.

Way forward:
- The Centre must initiate measures to move "police" to the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- The anti-terror law needs to be strengthened.

Threats from terrorism:

The threat from terrorism continues to increase.

- The ISI is working on the plan to engulf Assam in turbulence and is said to be coordinating strategies with radical elements among the Rohingyas and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam. Al Qaeda had declared its plans to intensify its activities in Assam as far back as 2014. The Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh has been steadily setting up units in Assam as well as West Bengal.
- In two other states — West Bengal and Kerala — the fundamentalists have been emboldened.
- In J&K, the Pakistan-sponsored terrorist groups, particularly Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Toiba, remains active.
- The Islamic State has been losing territories in Iraq and Syria but its ideology has caught on and lone wolf attacks continue to take place in different parts of the world. Even a small percentage of Muslims in India getting attracted to the ideology would be a good number and pose a serious challenge to the security of the state.

Conclusion:

The overall scenario is, thus, not good. It is high time that the security architecture is revamped. India has repeatedly given a call at international fora for united efforts to combat terrorism. However, first we need to put our internal security in order. The future of democracy and our capacity to sustain the momentum of economic progress would depend on our ability to reinforce and strengthen internal security.

Connecting the dots:

- India has repeatedly given a call at international fora for united efforts to combat terrorism. However, first we need to put our internal security in order. Comment.

ENVIRONMENT

General Studies 3

- *Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment*

Landscape Restoration Approach for sustainable development

Why this article is important for UPSC?

- It deals with **land degradation** and **climate change mitigation strategy**.
- It highlights the flaws in certain Indian State governments' tree cover and **landscape restoration policy/models**.
- It suggests for innovative models and approaches to achieve the country's climate goals.

Introduction:

We know that climate change is already having a significant impact on ecosystems, economies and communities. To prevent dangerous levels of global warming governments should act to limit global warming to less than 2ºC by taking concerted action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Therefore, restoring forest landscapes is recognized as one of the strategies for tackling some of the major environmental problems of our time, notably climate change, loss of biodiversity and desertification.

International efforts:

1. **The Paris Agreement**
   - Countries across the globe adopted an historic international climate agreement **[Paris Agreement]** at the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris in December 2015.
   - **Long-term goals of the Paris Agreement:**
     - to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C;
     - to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C; and
     - to achieve net zero emissions in the second half of this century.

2. **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)**
   - Countries publicly outlined what post-2020 climate actions they intended to take under the Paris Agreement, known as their **Intended Nationally Determined Contributions** (INDCs).
   - INDCs are the primary means for governments to communicate internationally the steps they will take to address climate change in their own countries.

- The climate actions communicated in these INDCs largely determine whether the world achieves the above provided long-term goals of the Paris Agreement.

3. **Bonn Challenge**
   - The Bonn Challenge is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030.
4. **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**
   - UN Convention on Biological Diversity (2011-2020) sets the bold goal of restoring at least 15% of the world's degraded ecosystems by 2020.

National efforts:

1. In 2015, India made a Bonn Challenge commitment – to restore 13 million hectares of degraded land by 2020 and an additional 8 million hectares by 2030.
2. India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) have also pledged to sequester 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO_2 equivalent additionally by 2030 through enhanced tree cover.
3. The National Mission for Green India (GIM) is one of the eight Missions outlined under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). It aims at protecting; restoring and enhancing India's diminishing forest cover and responding to climate change by a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures.

To achieve this, India will need to extend tree cover on at least 28-34 million hectares, outside of the existing forest cover.

Flaws in tree cover/landscape restoration policy:

To achieve the above commitments, different States are working on various models and approaches to improve the ecology.

- For example, in July this year, Madhya Pradesh planted 66 million trees in 12 hours to enter the record books, overtaking Uttar Pradesh's record of planting 49.3 million trees in a day, in 2016. Other States are also expected to follow suit.

However, studies highlight that there is an over-reliance on plantations and neither the Bonn Challenge nor the NDCs are about large-scale plantations alone.

Need for improving the ecology through landscape approach:

- The Bonn Challenge lays emphasis on **landscape approaches** — a model aimed at **improving the ecology of a landscape as a whole** in order to benefit local livelihoods and conserve biodiversity.
- The NDC lays emphasis not only on **carbon sequestration** but also adaptation to climate change through a strengthened flow of **benefits to local communities** that are dependent on forests and agriculture for sustenance.
- India's policy framework on forests also **lays emphasis on a landscape approach** to manage forest and tree cover, so that the flow of multiple ecosystem services — including food security, climate mitigation and adaptation, conservation of biological diversity and water supplies — is secured.

Final crux:

- Landscape approaches are better than large-scale plantations.
- Landscape approaches seek to provide tools and concepts for allocating and managing land to **achieve social, economic, and environmental objectives** in areas where agriculture, mining, and other productive land uses compete with environmental and biodiversity goals.

(Limitations of large-scale plantation drives)

In this context, large-scale plantation drives alone –often do not lay stress on species selection,

- do not lay stress on the quality of planting materials or survival rates,
- nor recognize tenure and resource or rights to ensure that the benefit flows to communities,
- do not really achieve the Paris agreement goals.

Way ahead: Shift from Large-scale plantations to Large-scale tree-based interventions

Restoration requires more than just planting the right species in large-scale. It has to consider and lay stress on species selection, quality of planting materials and survival rates. It should also consider social, economic, environmental objectives and the benefits to communities.

There is a need for improvement of degraded land on a large scale that rebuilds ecological integrity and enhances people's lives.

India has numerous models that are suited for different regions and farm household sizes to draw upon, and must not rely on plantation drives alone to secure environmental and developmental outcomes.

Examples of some successful models:

- The nation practises at least 35 types of **agroforestry models** that combine different trees that provide timber, fruits, fodder, fuel and fertilizers with food crops. This diversifies income from farming, and improves land productivity.
- **Farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR) systems** where farmers protect and manage the growth of trees and shrubs that regenerate naturally in their fields from root stock or from seeds dispersed through animal manure can also deliver several economic and ecosystem benefits.
- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development's **(NABARD's) 'Wadi' model** and the Foundation for Ecological Security's **re-greening of village commons project** are good examples of tree-based interventions which are proving to have great value in terms of cost-effectiveness as well as the range of benefits they deliver to communities.
- An important success factor in large-scale tree-based programmes is **security of tenure** and **land rights**.

Therefore, India needs to design its tree-based programmes better to meet climate goals.

It is also important to have in place a performance monitoring system to quantify tree survival rates and the benefits to communities. This can be achieved through a combination

of remote sensing, crowd sourced, ground-level monitoring with support from communities and civil society organisations.

Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM)

- As we regenerate trees through different interventions, it is critical to ensure that owners have the right to manage and use these trees.
- It is also critical to use scientific evidence-based methodology with a participatory approach to determine the right type of tree-based interventions most suitable to a certain land use.
- Towards this end a tool called the **Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM)** is being used in 40 countries to find the best methods for landscape restoration.

About ROAM

- The Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology (ROAM) is a tool produced by **IUCN** and the World Resources Institute (**WRI**).
- It provides a flexible and affordable framework for countries to rapidly identify and analyse areas that are primed for forest landscape restoration (FLR) and to identify specific priority areas at a national or sub-national level.
- The tool includes rigorous analysis of spatial, legal and socio-economic data and draws on consultations with key stakeholders to determine the right type of interventions.
- In India, this tool is being piloted in Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh. Therefore through ROAM India can design its tree-based programmes better to meet climate goals.

Conclusion:

India has the policy framework, the political will and financing to endorse landscape restoration. What we really need now is innovation and imagination to build replicable and scalable models with a participatory approach to achieve the country's climate goals through landscape restoration.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you understand by the term 'landscape restoration'? What is its significance for a developing economy like India? Discuss.

TOPIC:

General Studies 3

- *Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment*

UNFCCC COP-23 meeting

Background:

The below article deals with United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change UNFCCC COP-23 meeting outcomes – both failures and positive aspects of the meeting.

- The 23rd COP was concluded on November 17 in Bonn, Germany. It was the second "conference of the parties" since the Paris Agreement was struck in 2015.
- It was the first COP to be hosted by a small-island developing state with Fiji taking up the presidency, even though it was being held in Bonn.

Central focus of COP-23 meeting

- COP-23 meeting intended to clarify processes for the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through the creation of a rule book, with technical guidelines and processes.
- The key topics of contention were related to financial support, mitigation action, differentiation, and loss and damage — the same knots of disagreements that came up at COP-21 in Paris.
- About the role and obligations of developed countries to do their fair share to support poor and emerging countries.

Basics: About the Paris Agreement

- We know that, countries across the globe adopted an historic international climate agreement [called **Paris Agreement**] at the UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris in December 2015.
- **Long-term goals of the Paris Agreement:**
    - to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C;
    - to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C; and
    - to achieve net zero emissions in the second half of this century.

Therefore, this COP-23 meeting intended to explain what compliant measures would be taken to meet Paris Agreement goals and how it would be monitored.

Outcomes of COP-23

- Questions were raised in COP-23 meeting about the obligations and role of developed countries to do their fair share to support poor and emerging countries as they occupy the bulk of the planet's available carbon space.
- The meeting highlighted the poor implementation of actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by rich countries and also emphasized on phasing out coal usage.

Unfulfilled Obligations

1. **Fulfilling Kyoto Protocol**
    - Actions related to the Paris Agreement are intended for 2020-2030. However, the pre-2020 period is part of the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol.
    - Both the first phase of the Kyoto Protocol (2005-2012) and the second (2013-2020) principally laid out the responsibilities for reducing emissions by rich countries.
    - However, there has been little progress and the 2012 Doha Amendment, the agreement concerning the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol, has not been ratified by a sufficient number of countries to enter into force.

COP-23 Bonn outcome: (Hints at some positive advancement)

- Under pressure from poor and emerging economies, actions on the pre-2020 Kyoto period were added to the agenda in the first week of the Bonn meeting.
- As a result, in 2018 and 2019 there will be additional stocktaking on progress made on the Kyoto Protocol. There will also be climate finance assessments and all of these will be part of the overall process undertaken before 2020.
- Several countries have since expressed interest in ratifying the Doha Amendment and all these changes indicate some advancement.

2. **Fulfilling COP-19 Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage**
   - Another aspect of the obligations that need to be fulfilled by big emitters is related to economic and non-economic losses under the work programme on loss and damage.
   - In Warsaw, Poland, COP-19 established the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage to address the destruction likely from climate change, including extreme events (such as severe storms) and slow-onset events (such as sea-level rise).
   - The Warsaw negotiation recognised that even if the world were to drastically reduce its emissions, anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions already in the atmosphere would cause warming and severely affect the poorest countries that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
   - Therefore, it is important that such countries have access to economic and non-economic support, especially since their actions have not led to these increased concentrations of harmful greenhouse gas emissions.

COP-23 Bonn outcome: (Failure)

- The Paris Agreement recognises loss and damage and calls for enhanced action and support from the parties. However, loss and damage was not included in the COP-23 agenda for the Paris rule book, and this was rightly a big bone of contention with poor and developing economies.
- Fund allocation and further discussion on this issue has been postponed to 2018.
- This is alarming given that the world has already faced the wrath of numerous extreme events just in the last couple of years.

3. **Rich countries obligation to provide finance, technology, and building capacity for poorer countries**
   - A third aspect of the support from rich countries is about providing finance, technology, and building capacity for poorer countries, both to protect themselves from the effects of climate change and to help them move along a low-carbon pathway.

COP-23 Bonn outcome: (Failure)

- There were conflicts on financial support at various points, and on this topic, COP-23 was a failure.
- Without the proper means of implementation, the targets set by each country in Paris will not be achieved.
- There is also the promise of $100 billion each year by 2020 into the Green Climate Fund, which has not seen much inflow to meet the goal.
- There was therefore little progress on the key issue of finance and several important decisions were moved forward to be discussed at the next meeting to be held in Katowice, Poland in 2018.

Conclusion: Progress and actions needed

On the plus side, some positive initiatives were launched which will help to meet Paris Agreement Goals and to be carried out under the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Paris Agreement.

1. Member countries were required to submit detailed positions and information on their respective Nationally Determined Contributions.
2. Steps were also taken to spell out the details of the global stock-taking that will occur every five years starting in 2023 and on transparency measures that are part of the overall process.
3. Great ambitions have been shown to clamp down fossil fuels. The Bonn meeting saw the launch of the **Powering Past Coal Alliance**, which was led by Canada and the U.K., and joined by numerous countries and substate actors.
4. There was small but significant headway made regarding agriculture where a work plan was proposed by Parties on items related to climate change and agriculture, including improvements in soil fertility and carbon, management of land use and livestock maintenance. For India, these developments could be an excellent opportunity for learning from others and sharing local knowledge.

Much more needs to be done for the international community to truly grapple with climate change — we are still far from keeping the world safe from its harmful consequences. And for India, there is unfortunately no time left for delaying action on multiple fronts on the landscape of sustainable development, which itself will be derailed by a warming world.

Now what remains to be seen is the follow up from COP 23 Bonn meeting. How the conference of parties will take the UNFCCC mandate forward and the trajectory of climate change debate will shape that is what is eagerly being watched.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the outcomes of the recently concluded UNFCCC COP-23 meeting. Also highlight what measures should other countries and stakeholders go about dealing with climate change.

HEALTH

General Studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health*

Antimicrobial Resistance: On rise

In news: Antibiotic awareness week is being observed globally.

Introduction:

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) has become a global threat and developing countries like India are at the epicentre of this problem. The emergence of drug resistant pathogens happens when bacteria adapt to the presence of low dose antibiotics.

Public health at risk:

- AMR poses big challenges to treating common infectious diseases, resulting in prolonged infection, disability and death.
- Without effective antimicrobials, to check and treat infections, medical procedures such as organ transplantation, chemotherapy, diabetes management and major surgeries become high-risk affairs.
- This situation becomes a public health issue but it also threatens to undermine the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

How grave is the situation?

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) AMR surveillance network recently reported that resistance to the broad-spectrum antibiotics was more than 70 per cent in case of various bacteria.
- All classes of antibiotics have been reported for resistance in at least some of the pathogens they have been intended to treat.
- The emergence and spread of resistance mechanisms to last-resort antibiotics is a major threat for infection control and treatment worldwide.

Main sources of AMR:

Pharmaceutical industry effluents:

- In India, effluents generated from pharmaceutical industries are treated as per the pharmaceutical wastewater discharge guidelines prescribed by the Central Pollution

Control Board. The current standards do not include antibiotic residues, and they are not monitored in the pharmaceutical industry effluents.

- No consensus guidelines on the antibiotic residue discharge limits in industrial waste globally.
- The existing framework under the WHO (2016) is restricted to drug safety and does not include environmental safeguards.

Discharge of untreated urban waste:
- The uncontrolled discharge of untreated urban waste is another major source for AMR.
- Large proportions of the wastewater from hospitals, communities and urban runoff is discharged untreated or partially treated into rivers, lakes and seas.

Veterinary source:
- Antibiotic consumption in animal food. The misuse of antibiotics in poultry, livestock and fish to treat and prevent infections is very common.

National Action Plan:

In India, a national action plan, meant to deal with the issue of AMR, focuses on six priority areas —

- Awareness and understanding through education.
- Communication and training.
- Strengthening knowledge and evidence through surveillance.
- Infection prevention and control.
- Optimised antimicrobial use in health, animals and food.
- AMR-related research and innovation and strengthened leadership and commitment at international, and national.

It highlights the need for the integrated approach in multiple sectors such as human health, animal husbandry, agriculture and environment to overcome the AMR issues.

Global action plan (GAP) on AMR, 2015: It was developed by the WHO, the Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Organization for Animal Health.

Way forward:
- The issue of substandard drugs must be dealt with by enforcing tighter regulations.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has set standards for antibiotic residues in food products of animal origin.
- Improving the implementation of existing regulations around antibiotic use in poultry, livestock and fisheries will help in reducing unnecessary use of antibiotics in veterinary sector.
- A global standard must be developed on limits of antibiotic residue in industrial discharge.

Conclusion:

AMR threatens to undo the gains made by India in the control of infectious diseases like tuberculosis, malaria, HIV and other infections. Addressing the issue is the need of the hour. Given the complex nature of the problem, no individual nation has the capacity to address this problem independently and thus a global cooperation is required.

Connecting the dots:

- Antimicrobial resistance in India is only rising despite the National Action Plan, for tackling the same, in place. In this light discuss what more needs to be done in India and the need of global cooperation.

Further reading: https://iasbaba.com/2017/06/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-19th-june-2017/

New Rules on Antibiotic Resistance by WHO

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes*
- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*
- *Issues relating to Poverty and hunger*

Engaging Private Sector to end Malnutrition

Background:

Nutrition outcomes in South Asia are among the worst in the world.

- 38% of children (below five years) are stunted, as compared with 26% globally.
- Wasting prevalence at 15% is also high.
- Nearly half of women in the reproductive age suffer from anemia.
- South Asia not only suffers from under-nutrition related issues, but is also experiencing a growing epidemic of obesity, with nearly 29% of adults now overweight.

Note: Stunting, or short height for age, and wasting, or low weight for length/height, are important public health indicators.

India's position:

1. India has one of the highest percentages of malnourished children in the world at 42%. Despite running one of the oldest child nutrition programmes, the ICDS has so far failed to address the country's abysmal maternal and child health track record.

2. The Union women and child development (WCD) has identified 12,000 undernourished children across 77 districts in eight states, with new monitoring methods.
3. The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) found an unconscionably high percentage (38%) of children stunted and underweight (36%).
4. The just released 2017 Global Hunger Index shows India has slid three places from the 2014 list and is one of four countries with a fifth of its children suffering from wasting.

Factors that lead to poor nutrition:

- lack of access to clean drinking water, sanitation and health care
- low education
- poor consumption basket (skewed towards certain carbohydrates, for instance rice in Bangladesh and Myanmar)
- low consumer awareness
- poor quantity and quality of food
- Malnutrition problems can be traced to poor-quality diets lacking in diversity
- food insecurity due to inadequate production and lack of availability and affordability of certain food groups (eg fruits, dairy and meat)

In addition to above factors, other concerns such as - excessive use of chemicals in farming, export of better quality food, unhygienic food production/processing practices, and poor cooking practices (excessive use of oil and overcooking) – all these results in gross deficit of essential macronutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, etc.) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals).

Measures:

Governments, civil society organisations and donors have made significant efforts to improve nutrition outcomes through school meals, distribution of micronutrient supplements, campaigns for behaviour change and other social programmes.

For more than 40 years, governments have intervened with food transfers in pre-school Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) centres. These infant food transfers were mandated as legal rights first by the Supreme Court and then by the National Food Security Act 2013.

But these efforts are likely to fall short.

If we are to meet South Asia's SDG target of ending malnutrition by 2030, we must engage the private sector to accelerate progress.

Benefits of engaging the private sector:

- Business/private sector can play on key strengths such as large-scale production capacity, product and business model innovation, marketing expertise and extensive distribution networks and supply chains, to complement government and social sector efforts.

- Comparative analysis of different countries highlighted that businesses can leverage their product development expertise and production capacity to manufacture supplements and fortified food products (zinc-fortified rice, vitamin A-fortified edible oil, iodised salt).
- They can partner with governments and CSOs for distribution through social programmes.

For instance,

- In Bangladesh, edible oil millers mandatorily fortify their oil, and fortified rice is distributed to BPL women by the government through the Vulnerable Group Development Programme.
- In Myanmar, CSOs and government support rice fortification by private players by subsidizing capex and distributing through social programmes.

In addition to supplements, there are **five tangible opportunities to engage the private sector** in driving up nutrition outcomes in South Asia:

1. **Nudging (to attract or influence) customers to purchase nutrition products:**
   - Large and progressive retailers/retail chains can proactively carry nutritious products, display them prominently, and educate consumers on their benefits.
   - They can be a key channel of influence as consumers often rely on retailers for information and point-of-purchase decision-making.

2. **Tech-enabled nutrition awareness and service delivery:**
   - Technology and telecom businesses can build platforms to deliver nutrition-related information, track diets and key nutrition indicators.
   - These will help in early identification of deficiencies, and connect consumers to relevant health services.

3. **Influencing cooking practices:**
   - Media and food companies can help spread awareness on the nutritional value of different foods and improve cooking practices, through interventions such as health food TV shows.
   - Celebrity chefs can be key influencers.

4. **Workplace nutrition programmes:**
   - Companies can be effective channels for distributing nutritious food and building awareness among employees and their communities.

5. **CSR support for nutrition:**
   - Businesses that are not directly related to nutrition can also become "nutrition champions" by backing the cause as part of their social responsibility efforts.

- It can be used to generate awareness and deliver nutritious food through their social programmes.

Therefore, it is important to catalyze private sector engagement through ecosystem level changes and enabling policy environment. This could include reduced import duties on fortification machinery, tax holidays/incentives, introduction of "fat tax", input subsidies, among others.

Funding support in the form of grants and other sub-commercial debt options can also crowd-in private sector investment in nutrition. For businesses lacking knowhow to produce nutritious/fortified food items, CSOs could provide the necessary technical expertise.

Conclusion:

Addressing the nutrition crisis in the subcontinent requires concerted effort and the private sector can play an important complementary role. Private sector can help South Asia to meet its SDG target of ending malnutrition by 2030.

It is time that governments recognise this and formulate favourable policies and encourage the setup of multi-stakeholder networks that can catalyse private participation.

Evidence from other countries has shown that countries which have adopted a multi-sectoral framework, the results are tangible and specific. India needs demographic dividend and not a demographic disaster.

Connecting the dots:
- Can India meet sustainable development goals on poverty, hunger and malnutrition despite sluggish economy? Also examine the need for catalyzing private sector engagement to meet the above goal.
- What is food fortification and bio-fortification? Discuss how fortification can be a major strategy of the government of India to reduce malnutrition in India.

TOPIC
General Studies 2:
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health*

Change in India's Health Profile: New Challenges

Background:
The "India: Health of The Nation's States" report was released recently. The India State-level Disease Burden Initiative, was a joint study conducted by the Indian Council of Medical

Research, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

India's health challenges have changed sharply over the past couple of decades and is going to continue changing.

Change in health profile:

Global precedent shows that a country's health profile changes as its economy and level of urbanization grow.

- The threat posed by communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria, maternal, neonatal and nutritional diseases—collectively termed infectious and associated diseases in the report—declines.
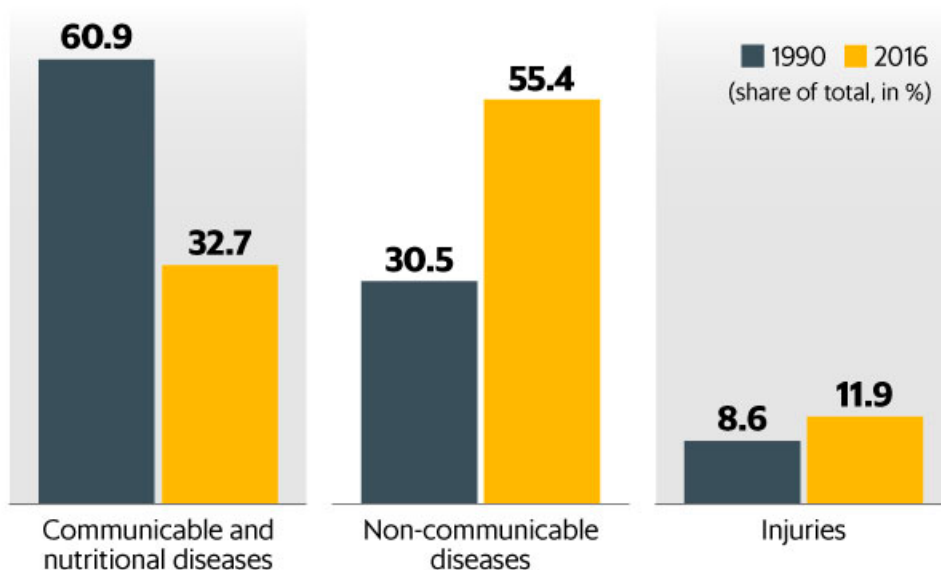- The burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) grows.

The World Health Organization predicts that over the next decade, NCD deaths will increase by 17% globally.

In Indian context:

- In 1990, the total disease burden of infectious and associated diseases in the country was 61%. The burden of NCDs at the time was 30%.
- In 2016 numbers have just flipped: infectious and associated diseases account for 33% of the disease burden while NCDs account for 55%.
- While life expectancy rose, data revealed that six out of 10 Indians (in 1990 it was less than one in three) now succumb to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like heart diseases, child and maternal malnutrition is the leading cause of premature death and poor health and the burden of tuberculosis is the highest in the world.
- The disease burden varies, indicating a widening health gap between the nation's wealthy and poorer states.

HEALTH CHECK

The share of non-communicable diseases in the total burden of disease increased to 55% in 2016 from 30% in 1990.

Source: Ministry of health and family welfare

Pic credit: http://www.livemint.com/Science/0p4OAvUMc82GPu0moAQqZJ/The-increasing-burden-of-non-communicable-diseases-in-India.html

Need for decentralized health policymaking:
There is wide divergence between the health profiles of various regions and states in India.

- While infectious and associated diseases now account for less than half of the disease burden in all the states, the transition happened as early as 1986 and as late as 2010 depending on the state in question.
- Likewise, the NCDs burden covers a substantial range—from 48% of the state disease burden to 75%.
- Kerala, Goa, and Tamil Nadu, relatively prosperous states, have the largest share of NCDs such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, mental health and neurological disorders, cancers, musculoskeletal disorders and chronic kidney disease.
- The burden due to specific diseases within the NCDs and the infectious and other diseases groups differs substantially. This is true not just between groupings of economically similar states—say, industrialized states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, and Empowered Action Group states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh—but between similar states as well.

In the above scenario, Centre-dominated health policymaking will diminish the effectiveness of state response.

Nature of State response needs to change:


There is a need for a multi-pronged approach.

- Urban planning- Ensuring that citizens lead a more physically active life would directly address a number of risk factors for NCDs. That means ensuring ease of access from everything to pedestrian access to public transport and communal green spaces.
- Bringing private enterprises on board—from displaying health information and advice in stores to appropriate food labelling, high salt warnings and product placement in stores.
- India should increase the percentage expenditure of GDP on healthcare from the current 1.1 per cent to at least 2.5-3 percent by 2025, with an increased focus on preventing and treating NCDs.
- An increased focus on NCDs at medical colleges
- Public-private partnership for efficient use of resources in training, education, diagnostics, and preventive care.
- Establishing NCD clinics at the primary healthcare level. Thus there is need for capacity building to tackle NCDs.

Conclusion:

A broad and diffuse response will not be easy to implement. Addressing the weak fundamentals of India's health system is critical. In the wake of rising cases of NCDs preventive healthcare system of India needs to be strengthened.

Connecting the dots:

- India's health profile is changing fast in the wake of ongoing urbanisation and economic growth. In such a scenario a multi-pronged and diffused policy-making is called for. Discuss.
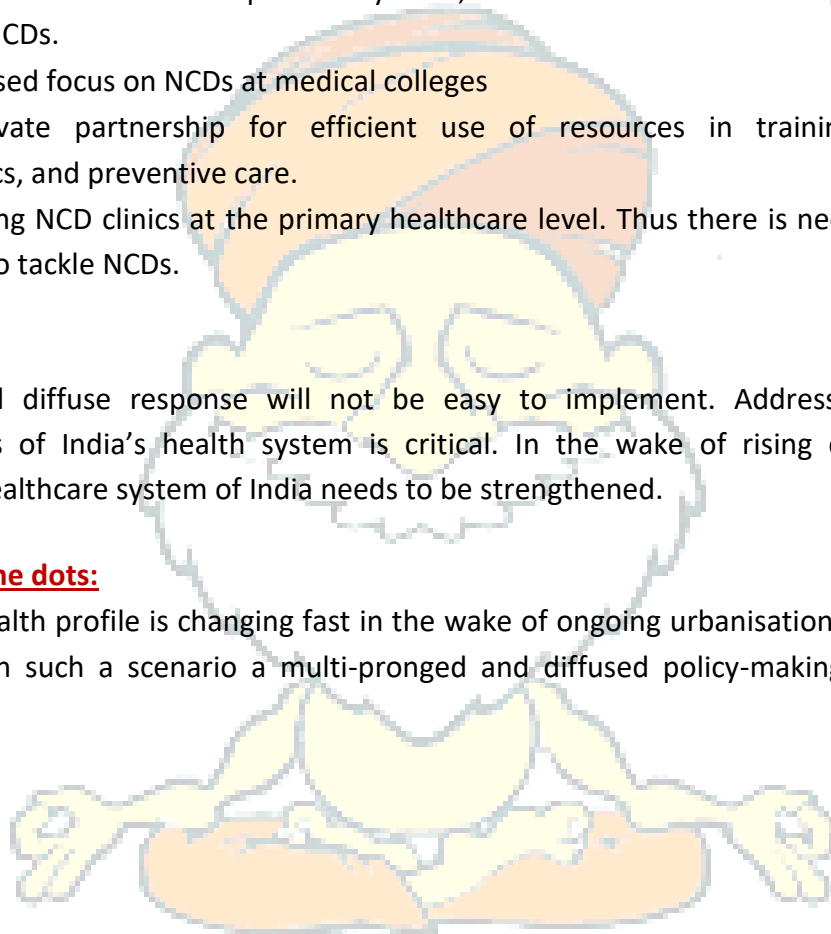
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Bots: Good & Bad

What are bots?

A bot is a computer programme designed to work automatically. It is mainly used to gather information on the Internet or perform repetitive jobs. It is typically a collection of algorithms. An algorithm is simply a piece of software code that operates like a decision tree, considering multiple variables and then spitting out a decision or recommendation. Some popular examples of bots are Apple's Siri, the Google Assistant, Amazon's Alexa and Microsoft's Cortana.

Are they good or bad?

Like for every technology, there are two sides to bots as well.

Good bots:

Search engine bots, commercial crawlers, feed fetchers and monitoring bots all fall in the classification of good bots. These are the tools that enable effective search engine optimization, digital marketing, website health reporting, mobile content etc.

Beneficial uses of a bot are:

- It gathers information. Bots in such guises are called web crawlers.
- Automatic interaction using instant messaging, instant relay chat or other web interfaces.
- Dynamic interaction with websites.
- Artificial intelligence-based bots are increasingly being used by organisations and entities to provide customer care, and sales and marketing services.
- Some banks have also introduced AI-based chatbots that are capable of interacting with users and answering information-related queries.

Bad bots:

Impersonators, spammers, scrapers and hacker tools are the bad bots. A malicious bot is a self-propagating malware that infects its host and connects back to a central server(s).

The bad side of bots:

- Malicious bots can gather passwords, log keystrokes, obtain financial information, relay spam, and exploit back doors opened by viruses and worms, among other things.

- They maliciously intend to scrap data, post comments redirecting to other websites or even find vulnerabilities to exploit them.
- Bots have also come under scrutiny in relation to automated accounts on Twitter and Facebook.
- Beyond the dangerousness of these bots, they also consume resources, like bandwidth and web servers, polluting the reactiveness of the website used by legitimate users concurrently.

How can one know if the computer is infected?

Symptoms such as a slow Internet or crashing of computer for no apparent reason, pop-up windows and advertisements appearing even when a web browser is not being used, friends and family receiving mails you did not send, or a fan going into "overdrive" when the device is idle may mean that the system is infected.

Precautions and remedies:

- It is important to have a good anti-malware software.
- All software should be updated and system updates should not be ignored.

Conclusion:

Algorithms have brought efficiency, craftiness, and speed to nearly everything. But as with most breakthrough innovations, they have raise grave issues. Given the bots are almost everywhere, the next step must be to tackle the shortcomings.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by the word 'bots'. What is the difference between good and bad bots. Discuss its applications.

PRELIMS + MAINS FOCUS

VALUE REVISIONS

Diabetes in women

Part of: Main GS Paper II – Social issue, Welfare and Health, Women issue
Key PT pointers:
1. **World Diabetes Day** is observed on 14th November
2. 2017 Theme: **'Women and Diabetes — Our Right to a Healthy Future'**

Central focus: Women Health

- One in 10 women are living with diabetes
- Poor access to healthcare, screening and awareness
- A diabetic female faces four times higher risk of developing heart ailments than men

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/focus-on-women-and-diabetes/article20393636.ece

The Maternity Benefit Act: Concerns

Part of: Main GS Paper II – Social issue, Welfare and Health, Women and Child issue
Key pointers:

- Amendments to the Maternity Benefit Act were introduced this year.
- Path-breaking changes/measures - provisions of 26 weeks of **paid maternity leave** and the **mandatory crèche facility**.
- Amendments seek to improve **infant mortality rate** (34 per 1,000 live births) and **maternal mortality rate** (167 per 100,000 live births).

Central focus:

- Maternity leave and crèche facility.
- One of the key goals of any maternity benefit policy is to facilitate breastfeeding by working mothers.
- To ensure that working women are not forced to discontinue breastfeeding.

Concerns:

- Financial burden of implementing these measures squarely on the employers.
- Set up of crèche facility are cost- intensive, therefore may deter employers from hiring or retaining pregnant women.

Making employers solely liable is not a viable option:

- 2014 ILO report had specially cautioned against making employers solely liable for the cost of maternity benefits.
- Advocated that maternity benefits should be provided either through compulsory social insurance or public funds.
- Standing Committee on Labour in 2007 had suggested that the government should create a corpus fund to partially sponsor the costs to be incurred by the employer to provide maternity benefits.

Article Link: http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/on-maternity-benefits/article20393885.ece

Climate change and UNESCO natural sites: IUCN report

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Environment and Ecology, Biodiversity, Impacts of Climate Change

Key pointers:

- Impact of climate change on UN-listed natural heritage sites, including coral reefs, glaciers, and wetlands have doubled — according to IUCN report.
- The number of UNESCO natural sites at risk has grown to 62 from 35 in 2014.
- 29% of UNESCO natural sites faced "significant" threats.

UNESCO natural sites at critical risk:

- Everglades National Park in the United States
- Lake Turkana in Kenya

Coral reefs: Most affected

- Among the ecosystems most threatened by global warming are coral reefs which bleach as oceans heat up, and glaciers which melt.
- The following three World Heritage-listed coral reefs — have been affected by "devastating" bleaching events over the last three years.
  3. the Aldabra Atoll in the Indian Ocean,
  4. the Belize Barrier Reef in the Atlantic, and
  5. Australia's Great Barrier Reef, the biggest on Earth.

Article Link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-life/many-unesco-natural-sites-are-in-danger/article20418837.ece

India, Japan, US, Australia hold first 'Quad' talks

Part of: Main GS Paper II – International Relations, India and the World, India-China issue, India's Act East Policy

Key pointers:
- Officials from India, Australia, the US and Japan met in Manila (capital of the Philippines).
- Seen as a first move to set up a quadrilateral grouping to pursue common interests.
- They agreed that a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large.
- The move to set up the quadrilateral comes in the backdrop of growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Common interests:
- Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Promotion of peace, stability and prosperity.
- Addressing common challenges of terrorism and proliferation linkages impacting the region as well as on enhancing connectivity.

Note:
- The Indian side highlighted India's Act East Policy as the cornerstone of its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.
- India also said it was open to working with like-minded countries on issues that advance its interests.
- Part of Post-Doklam measures by India.

Article Link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/post-doklam-india-asserts-itself-in-chinas-backyard/article20447155.ece

India's Health Divide

Part of: Main GS Paper II – Social issue, Welfare and Health

Key pointers:

Lancet published report on the **'India State-Level Disease Burden'** highlights -

1. severe inequalities in the disease burden in different States
2. every State in India has a higher burden from non-communicable diseases and injuries than from infectious diseases
3. **contribution of non-communicable diseases** to health loss has doubled (unhealthy diets, high blood pressure, and blood sugar)

4. Air pollution and tobacco smoking continue to be major contributors to health loss
5. suggests need for more specific health planning
6. malnutrition continues to be the single largest risk for health loss in India (higher among females)
7. life expectancy at birth improved significantly during 1990 to 2016
8. under-5 mortality also improved in every State
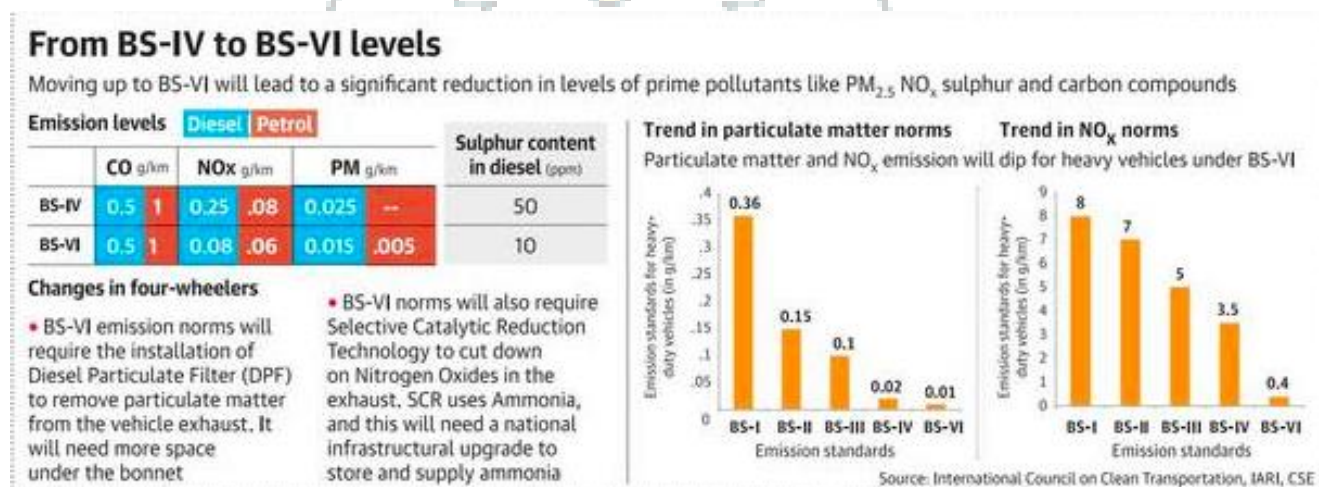9. Kerala – better performing state

Note: You can quote reports or findings of Lancet in your Mains answer.

Early introduction of BS-VI fuel in Delhi

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Environment and Ecology, Pollution, Health Issue

Key pointers:
- The Centre has decided to implement BS-VI fuel norms in Delhi by April 1, 2018, instead of the scheduled deadline of April 2020.
- For the rest of the country, the earlier deadline would remain.
- This has been done to deal with the critical pollution situation in the national capital.

From BS-IV to BS-VI levels

Moving up to BS-VI will lead to a significant reduction in levels of prime pollutants like $PM_{2.5}$, NO_x sulphur and carbon compounds

Emission levels	Diesel	Petrol					Sulphur content in diesel (ppm)
	CO g/km		NOx g/km		PM g/km		
BS-IV	0.5	1	0.25	.08	0.025	--	50
BS-VI	0.5	1	0.08	.06	0.015	.005	10

Changes in four-wheelers

- BS-VI emission norms will require the installation of Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) to remove particulate matter from the vehicle exhaust. It will need more space under the bonnet

- BS-VI norms will also require Selective Catalytic Reduction Technology to cut down on Nitrogen Oxides in the exhaust. SCR uses Ammonia, and this will need a national infrastructural upgrade to store and supply ammonia

Trend in particulate matter norms

Particulate matter and NO_x emission will dip for heavy vehicles under BS-VI

Emission standards for heavy duty vehicles (in g/km): BS-I 0.36, BS-II 0.15, BS-III 0.1, BS-IV 0.02, BS-VI 0.01

Trend in NO_x norms

Emission standards for heavy duty vehicles (in g/km): BS-I 8, BS-II 7, BS-III 5, BS-IV 3.5, BS-VI 0.4

Source: International Council on Clean Transportation, IARI, CSE

Challenge:
- Launching of BS-VI vehicles only for Delhi will be challenging as the fuel will not be available outside the capital and BS-VI vehicles cannot run on BS IV fuel.

Benefits of early introduction:
- Early rollout of BS-VI fuel in Delhi gives an opportunity to the vehicle manufacturers to test and validate the BS-VI vehicles being developed by the auto industry so as to be fully ready for the April 2020 deadline.
- The step will serve as the first stage in shifting the entire country onto BS-VI from BS-IV.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/centre-to-launch-bs-vi-fuel-in-delhi-from-2018-to-battle-smog/article20460547.ece

Tripura model

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Security, Naxalite issue, Extremists issue

Key pointers:
- In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Tripura embarked on a unique path to peace.
- They did not dependent solely on security measures but involved investment in human development and people's participation in the implementation of socio-political and economic policy as well.

Note:
- One can provide Tripura model as an example where human development consequences of peace have been remarkable.
- Economic and social investments and people's involvement were essential components of the Tripura model which led to peace process in the State.
- Repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA, in 2015 was an outstanding symbol of the success of this model.

Rated Highways soon

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Infrastructure, Road Accidents, Role of NGOs

Key pointers:

- India Road Assessment Programme (IndiaRAP) - to rate highways' safety levels, and seek to eliminate the most unsafe roads.
- The move is intended to make Indian roads safer and curb fatalities.

Ratings:

- The ratings are assigned on the basis of the level of safety which is 'built-in' to a road for vehicle occupants, motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Five-star roads are the safest while one-star roads are the least safe.

The IndiaRAP programme is being supported by different stakeholders (including NGOs) and will be hosted by the Asian Institute of Transport Development – to assess existing highways and promote the use of better design to make roads safer.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/highways-to-be-rated-on-safety-features/article20462480.ece

National Anti-Profiteering Authority

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment

The Union Cabinet recently approved the creation of the National Anti--profiteering Authority (NAA).

Key PT Pointers:
- NAA, the apex body is- mandated to ensure that the benefits of the reduction in GST rates on goods or ser-vices are passed on to the ul-timate consumers by way of a reduction in prices.
- The authority has been granted wide -ranging powers, includ-ing to cancel the registration of offending firms in extreme cases.

Central focus:
According to the rules, if the NAA confirms that there is a need to apply anti-prof-iteering measures-
- It can order the sup- plier to reduce its prices or return the undue benefit availed by it along with in-terest to the recipient of the goods or services.
- If above can't be done, then the company can be ordered to deposit the amount in the Consumer Welfare Fund.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/gst-rate-cut-cabinet-clears-setting-up-of-anti-profiteering-authority/article20489030.ece

International Conference on SDGs held in India

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Environment and Ecology, Pollution, Health Issue

Key PT pointer:
The first major international conference on the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be organised in India, was held in Mysuru.

Keynotes:
- Values of sustainable living must be imbibed at a young age if planet Earth had to be saved.
- By 2070 the world will be 70% urban, and therefore, the future of the world was one with the future of cities. Goal 11 of the SDGs pertained to sustainable cities.
- The challenge facing us now is that the "do-how" or ways of adopting change is lacking.
- The youth of today are going to be the force to make the change possible.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/mysuru-meet-on-un-sdgs-calls-for-sustainability/article20493365.ece

Al-Qaeda's vernacular push

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Internal Security

Key pointers:
- Al-Qaeda has launched its first organised campaign to use the Internet to recruit support across India.
- In the Indian Subcontinent it has begun online distribution of Tamil, Bengali and Hindi translations of key jihadists.
- The organisation's vernacular push reflects the increasing reliance of the jihadist movement on recruits from states in the southern, western and eastern regions.

The organisation appears to want to use the online world to raise its image, as the Islamic State did.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/aqis-al-qaeda-in-the-indian-subcontinent-goes-vernacular-with-tamil-hindi-and-bengali-texts-online-4941193/

Universal Health Coverage definition

Part of: Main GS Paper II - Social issue, Welfare and Health

WHO's definition of UHC:
One of the goals of sustainable development the definition includes-
- Financial risk protection (against medical expenses).
- Access to quality essential health care services.
- Access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

In 2011, a high-level expert committee, was formed by the erstwhile Planning Commission. It submitted its report on UHC but nothing much came of it.

TB elimination in India: Steps being taken
India has adopted the National Strategic Plan for Tuberculosis Elimination 2017-25. TB kills an estimated 480,000 Indians every year and more than 1,400 every day.
- India is spending $3 billion of domestic funds towards TB elimination. The three pillars of TB elimination are Aadhaar, Jan Dhan Yojana and **Nikshay**, a web-based platform for notification and tracking of TB patients.
- Commercial serological tests for TB has been banned and every district is being provided with a GenExpert machine (for TB detection).

India's sovereign rating raised by Moody's

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, growth, development, investment.

Key PT pointers:
- Global ratings agency Moody's revised India's sovereign ranking to Baa2 from Baa3.
- The upgradation has taken place for the first time in 13 years.
- According to Moody, implementation of a string of economic reforms – GST, demonetization, UID, direct benefit transfer and new monetary policy system – have strengthened economy.
- India now rated higher than Brazil, Russia and South Africa but lower than China.

Challenges being faced by Indian economy, as highlighted by the agency:
- The GST's implementation challenges.
- Weak private sector investment.
- The slow resolution of banks' bad loans.
- Pending land and labour market reforms

Long term gains:
- The upgraded sovereign rankings to bring more foreign investments.

Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS)

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Cyber Security issues.

Key PT pointers:
- The Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS) is one of the world's largest conferences in the field of cyberspace and related issues.
- The conference will be held on November 23 and 24, 2017 at Aerocity in New Delhi.
- The theme for this year's GCCS is "**Cyber4All: A Secure and Inclusive Cyberspace for Sustainable Development**".

- The first ever GCCS was held in London in 2011, the second GCCS in 2012 in Budapest, the third edition of GCCS was held in 2013 in Seoul. The fourth version GCCS 2015 was held in 2015 in The Hague, Netherlands

Central focus:

The overall goals of GCCS 2017 are-

- To promote the importance of inclusiveness and human rights in global cyber policy.
- To defend the status quo of an open, interoperable and unregimented cyberspace.
- To create political commitment for capacity building initiatives to address the digital divide and assist countries.
- To develop security solutions.

Article link: http://www.moneycontrol.com/news/trends/current-affairs-trends/india-to-host-global-conference-on-cyber-space-on-nov-23-24-2440719.html

Joint India-Bangladesh Training Exercise "Sampriti 2017"

Part of: Main GS Paper II – International Relations, India and the World, Security issues

Key PT pointers:

- It was conducted in Mizoram.
- It was the seventh such exercise in the Sampriti series.

Central focus:

- To strengthen and broaden the aspects of interoperability and cooperation between the Indian and Bangladesh armies.
- Further helps to strengthen bilateral ties.

Article link: http://www.firstpost.com/india/india-bangladesh-joint-military-exercise-sampriti-2017-concludes-in-mizoram-officials-say-bilateral-ties-strengthened-4214003.html

Indian Road Assessment Programme (IndiaRAP)

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Infrastructure, Road Accidents, Role of NGOs

Key PT pointers:

- Global logistics major FedEx Express launched a road assessment programme for India.
- It is meant to address safety concerns.
- This is in partnership with International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP).

- International Road Assessment Programme is a registered charity dedicated to preventing road deaths through safer infrastructure.
- The programme launched in India is titled Indian Road Assessment Programme (IndiaRAP).

FedEx has also made a commitment to invest USD 200 million globally, including India.

Central focus:

- India accounts for one of the highest road accidents globally. Every year, 1.5 lakh people are killed while 3 lakh are crippled in 5 lakh accident
- IndiaRAP aims to address the highest-risk roads around the country in partnership with national and state agencies.
- The programme will provide policy, performance tracking and investment tools for the government to measure and manage road safety infrastructure and optimise investments across the country.

Article link: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/indl-goods/svs/packaging/fedex-express-sets-into-motion-road-module-for-india/articleshow/61656036.cms

PSLV to be built by domestic industry by 2020

Part of: Mains GS Paper III - Indigenization of technology and developing new technology, Space Technology.

Key pointers:

- ISRO is preparing to hand over the entire range of launch vehicle, including the PSLV and the GSLV, manufacture to domestic industry by 2020.
- It will give a push to industry for production of end -to -end systems. Ultimately, we hope to see industry make the transition from vendors supplying parts, to partners providing integrated systems.
- ISRO already has a partnership with private industry to produce satellites. ISRO had a partnership with about 500 domestic indus-tries for the supply of various com-ponents and devices.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/first-industry-built-pslv-by-2020/article20535383.ece

India and France

Part of: Main GS Paper II – International Relations, India and the World, Security issues

Key areas:

- decided to strengthen counter-terror cooperation, and asked the international community to oppose countries which are financing, sheltering and providing safe havens to terrorists.
- decided to strengthen cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)
- discussed concrete measures to expedite operations at the Jaitapur nuclear power project.
- Other areas - International Solar Alliance

Ahmedabad: India's first heritage city

- Ahmedabad - 600-year-old enclave was named India's first 'World Heritage City' in July
- Ahmedabad hosts the towering Bhadra fort, the legendary stone latticework of the 16th-century Sidi Saiyyed mosque, and countless relics fusing the unique Hindu and Muslim architectural styles of its conquerors.

Concerns:

- It lacks a convincing plan for protecting its ancient citadels, mosques and tombs.
- It faces task of defending its new UNESCO status
- chronic air pollution, crushing traffic and chaotic urban sprawl - are rapidly eroding its cultural capital
- UNESCO might revoke or downgrade Ahmedabad's listing to "heritage in danger" if Ahmedabad fails to show it has slowed the decline and destruction of the old city.

The India State-level Disease Burden Initiative

Part of: Main GS Paper II – Social issue, Welfare and Health

Key PT pointers:

- The health study was conducted jointly by the Indian Council of Medical Research, Public Health Foundation of India and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.
- It comprehensively identified the disease burden of the country. It revealed the extent of disease burden, which if unaddressed on a war footing could hurt the country's enormous growth potential.

Key findings:

- Between 1990 and 2016 the life expectancy improved significantly.
- The disease burden has undergone a structural shift: six out of 10 Indians now die due to non-communicable diseases (like a heart attack).

- Child and maternal malnutrition continue to cause premature deaths (an estimated six million children die before they are five years old).
- The study captures the disease burden expressed as the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death—it was nine-fold for diarrhoeal diseases and tuberculosis, and seven-fold for lower respiratory infections in 2016.
- The inequalities in the disease burden suggest that regional growth disparities will only widen.

Way forward:

The health atlas should be used by policy planners in order to develop customized curative solutions, instead of universalizing the strategy.

Article link: http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/iQQ8Jknx2kZ6ySJEVu2PqK/Indias-first-health-atlas-mirrors-a-health-emergency.html

World Economic Outlook report of IMF

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, growth, development, investment.

Key PT pointers:
- The report published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ranks over 200 countries in terms of per capita GDP based on purchasing power parity (PPP)
- India has moved up one position to 126th in terms of per capita GDP of countries while Qatar remains the world's richest on this parameter, as per IMF data.
- Among BRICS countries, India has the lowest per capita GDP.
- Singapore, Brunei, Ireland and Norway are top five countries.

What is PPP?

Purchasing power parity (PPP) between two countries is the rate at which the currency of one country needs to be converted into that of a second country to ensure that a given amount of the first country's currency will purchase the same volume of goods and services in the second country as it does in the first.

Article link: http://www.livemint.com/Money/5MFOB8LlF5NMPYcGAnTZpI/India-up-one-place-on-Per-Capita-GDP-terms-to-126-Qatar-No.html

A new surrender policy for militants in J&K

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Internal Security

Key pointers:

- A fresh surrender policy has been framed by the government, the Army and the J&K Police.
- The government has taken inputs from all security agencies to frame the fresh policy
- They said local militants in Jammu and Kashmir could use the helpline if they want to come back.

Central focus:

- Earlier, the surrender policy was limited to those who crossed the Line of Control into Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the early 1990s and were stuck there.
- The new surrender policy is considering provision of "passports and jobs to any local youth who gives up the gun" and "support for his full assimilation into society."

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/jk-police-army-offer-surrender-option-to-local-militants/article20555586.ece

M-STRiPES

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Environment and Ecology, Biodiversity, Impacts of Climate Change

Key PT pointers:

- An app named M-STRiPES (Monitoring System For Tigers-Intensive Protection and Ecological Status) has beendeveloped by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.
- It will be used for the first time in the forthcoming All-India Tiger Estimation, to be taken up in December-January.
- The national tiger estimates **is c**onducted once in four years, with the first conducted in 2006.
- It is a free app that will be made available to staff participating in the tiger census exercise, and they will feed in their observation during the carnivore sign survey and transect marking.
- Details such as pellet density, vegetation status and human disturbance, if any, will also be recorded.

Central focus:

- The use of the app would ensure a more robust estimate.
- With the availability of M-STRiPES, human error will be eliminated.
- The GIS-based app will give real-time data on forest habitats besides providing live update of monitoring and patrolling activities.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/an-app-to-get-tiger-numbers-right/article20606879.ece

The Kaizala App

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.

Key Pointers:

- The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has come forward to extend its cooperation to Andhra Pradesh in achieving the Open Defecation Free (ODF) goal.
- Real time governance and 1,100 parishkara vedika- E-initiatives taken by the government were appreciated.
- Mr. Gates was impressed with the Kaizala app launched by the government. More than 30 departments and over 70,000 users in Andhra Pradesh government use Microsoft Kaizala for day-to-day work.

About the Kaizala app:

- Launched by technology giant Microsoft.
- It is a productivity app that has been designed to enhance the collaboration and communication experience for Indian enterprises.
- The 'Made for India' app is designed for large group communications and work management.
- It works even on 2G networks.
- The product will make it possible for organisations to interact with people within the organisation as well as outside like partners and vendors in a seamless manner.

The app has seen significant adoption among Indian organisations like Yes Bank, Apollo Telemedicine, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan etc.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Vijayawada/gates-foundation-to-help-ap-in-odf-goal/article20606778.ece

Deal for ATGM with Israel cancelled

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Internal Security

Key pointers:

- Defence ministry cancelled the nearly-done deal for Spike Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGM) with Israel. raise questions about her claim.

- With the DRDO promising to provide a Man-Portable Anti-Tank Guided Missile (MPATGM) in the next four years, the ministry decided to retract the tender, thereby bringing the process to an end.

The withdrawal of the tender leaves the army in an uncertain state-

- The army is short of nearly 68,000 missiles and has zero stocks in the War Wastage Reserves (WWR) against a government stipulation of a minimum of 10 days of WWR stocks.
- Similar has been the state of modernisation of other arms of the army, whether it be Air Defence or Army Aviation or Engineers.
- As the armed forces are tasked to prepare for a two-front collusive threat — and with tensions with China rising after the Doklam face-off — such deficiencies cannot be allowed to continue.

The situation is complicated by the DRDO's uninspiring track record in producing high-end weapons.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/ministry-of-defence-make-in-india-israel-missile-deal-4946842/

Usage of pellet guns resulting into enormous cost

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Internal Security

Key pointers:

- At least 2,524 people were injured by the use of pellet guns by security forces during the protests that rocked the Valley following the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani in July last year.
- The government's data speaks of the enormous costs — social, political and economic — of the indiscriminate use of pellet guns.

What now?

- The governments, both in J&K and the Centre, must go beyond piecemeal efforts and formulate a comprehensive policy for compensation as well as re-examine the use of pellet guns.
- The decision to provide government jobs to those who have been blinded, apart from providing economic relief, could be a step towards giving the aggrieved and alienated a stake in the system.

Pellet guns were first introduced in the state after the 2010 protests, when 100 people were killed in firing by the security forces.

Moscow Declaration

Part of: Main GS Paper II – Social issue, Welfare and Health

Health ministers, NGOs, and private sector representatives from 120 countries adopted the Moscow Declaration.

Key PT pointers:
- The countries committed themselves to eliminating additional deaths from HIV co-infection by 2020 and achieving synergy in coordinated action against TB and non-communicable diseases.
- A co-infection is when a person suffers from two infections at the same time.
- Described as a milestone in the history of TB.
- India is among the signatories to the declaration.
- India's decision to move to a daily drug regimen for TB won applause.

The declaration:
- The Moscow declaration emphasised the need for fixing multisectoral responsibility towards ending TB by 2035, the global target.
- The framework is critical to creating an enabling operational environment for multisectoral action, fast-tracking priority interventions, monitoring overall progress, and accelerating advocacy at all levels within different sectors, all of which is necessary to achieve committed milestones and the targets to end the TB epidemic.
- It said that multi-drug resistant TB would be tackled as a national public health crisis.
- A national inter-ministerial commission will be set up by 2018 to achieve "fast-tracking universal access to health care through all state and non-state care providers by adopting WHO-recommended TB diagnostics, drugs, technologies and standards of care, and ensuring attention to high-risk groups and vulnerable populations such as migrants, refugees and prisoners."

Justice Dalveer Bhandari Re-elected to ICJ

Part of: Main GS Paper II – International Relations, India and the World, Security issues

India's nominee to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Dalveer Bhandari has been re-elected to the fifth seat of the court after Britain withdrew its candidate from the election.

Key pointers:

- This is the first time in the 70-year history of the United Nations that the U.K. will not be on the ICJ.
- This is the first time that one of the five permanent members of the UNSC lost out to an ordinary member in a race.
- This is also the first time that one sitting member of the ICJ lost to another sitting member.
- The UN Security Council and the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in support of India. Judge Dalveer Bhandari received all 15 votes in the UN Security Council and 183 out of the 193 votes in the UN General Assembly.

About ICJ:

- The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.
- It was established in 1945 via the UN Charter and its jurisdiction is worldwide.
- It is located in "The Hague" in Netherlands and has 193 state parties.

Functions:

The major functions of the International Court of Justice are

- To settle legal disputes submitted to it by states.
- To provide advisory opinions on legal questions submitted to it by duly authorized international organs, agencies, and the UN General Assembly.

Judges of the ICJ:

- The Court is composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office by the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council sitting independently of each other.
- It may not include more than one judge of any nationality.
- Elections are held every three years for one-third of the seats, retiring judges (in this case-Justice Dalveer) may be re-elected. The Members of the Court do not represent their governments but are independent magistrates.
- To be appointed at the ICJ, a candidate requires a majority in both the General Assembly and the Security Council of the UN.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/faced-with-defeat-uk-withdraws-india-wins-international-court-of-justice-seat/article20609566.ece

New Penal Law for Triple Talaq

Part of: Main GS Paper I – Social issue and Welfare

Key Pointers:

- The Union government has set up a ministerial committee to frame a new law that would attract penal provisions in the case of use of triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat for divorce between Muslim couples.
- Set aside by SC- The Supreme Court had, this year, in a majority judgement set aside the practice of talaq-e-biddat.
- Talaq-e-biddat or Triple Talaq- an arbitrary and unilateral decision by a Muslim husband to end the marriage by utterance of the word talaq three times.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/triple-talaq-centre-forms-ministerial-panel-to-consider-law-to-end-the-practice/article20614551.ece

'Peace Clause': India putting in efforts to make it permanent

Part of: Main GS Paper II – International Relations, India and the World, Security issues

Key Pointers:

- The WTO's Ministerial Conference is to take place at Buenos Aires in Argentina in December.
- Ministerial Conference is the highest decision-making body.
- Top priority for India at WTO- Food security, and Protection of low-income and resource-poor farmers.
- Currently, an interim mechanism called the 'Peace Clause' is in place.
- The Bali declaration, 2013 stated that the peace clause was an interim arrangement, and a permanent solution should be negotiated by December 2017.

Peace clause:

- The 'Peace Clause' is available to developing nations, including India, till a permanent solution is found to public stockholding for food security purposes.
- As per the clause, WTO members had agreed not to challenge developing nations at the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism if they breach the cap of the product-specific domestic support (which is 10% of the value of production).
- The peace clause protects India's food procurement programmes against action from member-countries in case subsidy ceilings are breached.

Central focus:

- India will not agree to severe restrictions on its right to give price subsidies to farmers through the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to procure grains from them for food security purposes.

- India would fight to ensure that at least the 'Peace Clause' is made the permanent solution.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/wto-india-resolute-on-food-security/article20628543.ece

Infrastructure Status to the Logistics Sector

Part of: Main GS Paper III – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, growth, development, investment.

The Centre has granted infrastructure status to the logistics sector.

Issues with the sector till now:
- The cost of logistics is extremely high in India with some estimates putting it at about 13% of GDP, which is higher than the U.S. (9) and Germany (8).
- High logistics cost reduces the competitiveness of Indian goods both in domestic as well as export markets.

Benefits:
- The sector can now avail loans at competitive terms that come along with the infrastructure status.
- Development of logistics would give a boost to both domestic and external demand thereby encouraging manufacturing and 'job creation.' This will, in turn, be instrumental in improving country's GDP.
- The infrastructure status will reduce the cost of capital in transportation and warehousing, thereby reducing the cost of logistics.
- Infrastructure industries get longer maturity loans compared to typical manufacturing sector.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/infra-status-for-logistics-sector/article20601964.ece

Poor Reach of ATMs in Rural Areas

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, growth, development, investment.

The latest RBI figures reveal that the number of ATMs in rural areas has shrunk by a little over 1,000 in past one year. India's rural areas were the worst hit during demonetisation.

The RBI's remonetisation drive has not resolved the cash supply to ATMs in rural areas, forcing the shutdown of many ATMs.

Issue:
- Public sector banks operate only about 20 per cent of their ATMs in rural areas.
- The reach of private banks in the hinterland is far poorer, with just 8 per cent of their machines functioning in these areas.

White-label ATMs
- The RBI took this initiative so as to grant licences to non-bank entities to set up white-label ATMs (WLAs), with the aim of expanding reach of ATMs in semi-urban and rural areas.
- Under the RBI's guidelines, a minimum number of WLAs have to be installed in Tier-III to -VI centres. Hence, about 42 per cent of WLAs operate in rural areas.
- However, since the total number of WLAs itself is significantly smaller than bank-operated ATMs, access to money still remains a challenge.
- Owing to regulatory constraints and the number of transactions failing to scale up in remote areas, WLA operators have found it difficult to generate revenues and hence expand further. Cash supply issues have made matters worse.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/cash-woes-persist-in-rural-india-as-atms-disappear/article9971015.ece

Bamboo: No more a tree as per Indian law

Part of: Main GS Paper II - Social issue, Welfare, government schemes and policies.

Key PT pointers:
- The government amended the Indian Forest Act and removing the bamboo - taxonomically a grass - from a list of plants that also included palms, skumps, brush-wood and canes.
- After 90 years, the bamboo has legally ceased to be a tree.
- Bamboo grown in the forest areas would continue to be governed by the provisions of the Indian Forest Act.
- The current demand of bamboo in India is estimated at 28 million tonnes. Though the country has 19% share of the world's area under bamboo cultivation, its market share in the sector is only 6%.

Central focus:

- For several years now, the classification of the bamboo as a tree meant that it couldn't be easily ferried across State borders. It also required permits from village councils and couldn't be cultivated in non-forest areas.
- The government hoped to promote cultivation of bamboo in non-forest areas to achieve the "twin objectives" of increasing the income of farmers and also increasing the green cover of the country.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/bamboo-ceases-to-be-a-tree-freed-of-forest-act/article20716924.ece

PM Modi at the Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS)

Part of: Main GS Paper II - Social issue, Welfare, Women empowerment, government schemes and policies.

Key pointers:
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for sharing of information and coordination among nations to ensure that "digital space does not become a playground for the dark forces of terrorism and radicalisation".
- He pitched for creating "cyberwarriors" to keep the digital space safe.
- Alertness towards cybersecurity concerns should become a way of life.
- We need to ensure that cyberprotection becomes an attractive and viable career option for the youth.

Note: Above points can be mentioned while writing an essay on topics related to cybersecurity.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/unite-to-fight-dark-forces-in-digital-space-pm/article20744331.ece

UMANG mobile app

Part of: Main GS Paper II - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation

Key PT pointers:
- A unified app to serve e-governance through mobile devices.
- Called Umang (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance), the app is developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and

National e-Governance Division (NeGD) to offer services of the central, state, local bodies, and various government agencies right on Android and iOS based mobile devices.

- The new offering had emerged on the sidelines of the fifth Global Conference on Cyberspace (GCCS) in New Delhi.
- It has multilingual support with as many as 10 Indian languages in addition to Hindi and English and includes a payment-based transaction access.

Central focus:

- It will provide over a hundred citizen-centric services. At the back-end, these services will be catered for by different departments of the Union and State Governments. This integrated approach will add an automatic layer of 'peer performance pressure', in the working of these departments.
- The Umang app bundles a list of Digital India services, including Aadhaar, DigiLocker, and PayGov.
- In terms of e-governance, citizens can use the Umang app to access their income tax filing, LPG cylinder bookings, and Provident Fund account. Parents can also use the Umang app to access CBSE results.
- Also, the Umang app has social media integration that allows you to connect your Facebook, Google, and Twitter accounts and enable one-touch login process.

Article link: https://gadgets.ndtv.com/apps/news/pm-narendra-modi-umang-app-e-governance-services-android-ios-download-1779230

Amendments to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code

Part of: Main GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, growth, development, investment.

President recently gave his assent to the ordinance approved by the Union Cabinet to amend the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) to strengthen the regime.

Key pointers:

- Prohibits wilful defaulters, those associated with non-performing assets (NPAs), and the habitually non-compliant, from regaining control of the defaulting company or stressed assets through the back door in the garb of being a 'resolution applicant'.
- The sale of property to a person who is ineligible to be a resolution applicant has been barred.
- It also provide for fine ranging from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 2 crore for those violating these norms.

- A new section has been introduced in the IBC that makes certain persons ineligible to be a 'resolution applicant'.
- Those being made ineligible include "wilful defaulters, those who have their accounts classified as NPAs for one year or more and are unable to settle their overdue amounts including interest thereon.
- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has also been given additional powers.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-business/president-signs-bankruptcy-ordinance/article20744245.ece

A comprehensive 'safe city' plan for women

Part of: Main GS Paper II - Social issue, Welfare, Women empowerment, government schemes and policies.

Key PT pointers:
- Eight cities in India will soon have a comprehensive 'safe city' plan for women.
- Eight cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Lucknow and Hyderabad.
- A robust emergency response system and police-verified public transport will come into place.

Central focus:
- The Nirbhaya fund largely remain un-utilised. Creation of comprehensive plan will help utilise this fund.
- Issues related to women security includes- 33 per cent reservation of women in police force, installation of CCTV cameras, deployment of women, emergency response system, mapping dark spots, transports and different safety apps, developed by various State Police.
- Initiatives taken by these cities include 'Himmat' app, all women patrol van, 'shishtachar' programme of the Delhi police; 'Hawkeye' mobile app and 'Bharosa' programme of the Hyderabad police; 'Suraksha' app of the Bengaluru police and Power Angels of Uttar Pradesh police.
- The steps taken by other metro cities- mobile counselling vans for hearing the grievances of women, lighting in the sub-urban railway station areas, complaint boxes in the colleges, dedicated helpline for women, awareness programmes organised by the police, setting up of shelter homes for women and making provisions for street lighting were   also   discussed.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/safe-city-plan-for-women-to-kick-off-in-eight-cities/article20667451.ece

NPPA

Part of: Main GS Paper II – Welfare and Health

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority has capped the prices of 51 essential formulations, including those used for the treatment of cancer, pain, heart conditions and skin problems.

About NPPA:
- NPPA fixes the ceiling price of essential medicines of Schedule I under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) 2013.
- In respect of medicines that are not under price control, manufacturers are allowed to increase the maximum retail price by 10 per cent annually.
- The calculation for essential drugs is based on the simple average of all medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1 per cent.
- Set up in 1997, NPPA has been entrusted with the task of fixation/revision of prices of pharma products, enforcement of provisions of DPCO and monitoring of prices of controlled and decontrolled drugs.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/nppa-caps-prices-of-51-essential-formulations/article9971686.ece

WHO guidelines on responding to child sexual abuse

Part of: Mains GS Paper II - Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of the vulnerable sections.

Key pointers:
- WHO has formulated clinical guidelines on responding to children and adolescents who have been sexually abused.
- Recommendations are for the frontline health care providers — general practitioners, gynecologists, pediatricians, nurses etc.
- The guidelines highlight that child sexual abuse has a short-term as well as long-term mental health impact.
- Mental health impacts include- anxiety, depression, eating disorders, problems with relationships, sleep disorders and suicidal and self-harm ideation etc.

- Health consequences of the abuse includes- the risk of pregnancy, gynecological disorders, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV etc.

The presence of guidelines and following them is extremely essential. The guidelines should be followed with ground training of all first line respondents.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/who-releases-guidelines-on-responding-to-child-sex-abuse/article20945548.ece

41-Nation Islamic Military Alliance pledges to fight terror

Part of: Mains GS Paper III - Internal Security

The first high-level meeting of the Saudi Arabia kingdom-led alliance of Muslim nations against terrorism, was held recently.

Key pointers:
- Saudi Arabia announced the alliance in December 2015.
- Islamic State group sparked the creation of the alliance. The IS has been driven out of Iraq and lost its self-described capital in Syria.
- The alliance, initially announced with 34 nations, now includes 41, according the Saudi government.
- The alliance doesn't include Iran, Iraq or Syria.
- The meeting sent a strong signal that the 41 nations are going to work together and coordinate together to support each other.

Article link: http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2017/nov/26/saudi-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salman-leads-islamic-military-alliance-meeting-1711631.html

First AI politician- SAM

Part of: Mains GS Paper III - Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Key pointers:
- Scientists have developed the world's first artificial intelligence politician.
- The robot can answer a person's queries regarding local issues such as policies around housing, education and immigration.
- The virtual politician, called **SAM**, was created by Nick Gerritsen, a 49-year-old entrepreneur in New Zealand.

- The AI politician is constantly learning to respond to people through Facebook Messenger as well as a survey on its homepage.

Article link: http://www.hindustantimes.com/science/meet-sam-world-s-first-ai-politician-that-hopes-to-run-for-new-zealand-election-in-2020/story-TPnkQNM4UQae3IgcifZq4K.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

YONO

Part of: Mains GS Paper III - Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Key pointers:
- YONO (You Only Need One) is the new, unified integrated app from State Bank of India (SBI).
- The bank is looking to woo the millennials and generation-next with the new app.
- Even if one is not an SBI customer, he or she can open an account using the Aadhaar account and PAN and proceed to install YONO on the handset.
- YONO is designed to meet lifestyle needs across a wide range of categories, 14 as of now, with SBI partnering with 60 leading names in the e-commerce space.
- It is developed using artificial intelligence, predictive analysis and machine learning.
- It promises to deliver maximum customer convenience, and has Android and iOS versions for download.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/money-and-banking/yono-app-from-sbi-promises-to-liven-up-lifestyle-banking-dono/article9973499.ece

ISRO's Solar Mission Aditya-L1

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Space Technology and achievements of ISRO

Key pointers:
- By 2019 or 2020 India will send ISRO's solar mission Aditya-L1 to a vantage point in space, known as the L1 Lagrange point, to do imaging and study of the sun.
- The 1,500-kg class satellite will be programmed to orbit the L1 point and image the sun's magnetic field from space for the very first time in the world.
- Scientists hope to capture the close-ups of the sun, uninterrupted by eclipses for years.

- Aditya-L1 is expected to be the very first to study from space two months from the time of launch, the magnetic field of the sun's corona.
- Few other space agencies have successfully placed their satellites at the L1 point, example- SOHO, ACE etc.
- It will be the first 100% Indian mission which will not only negotiate a challenging orbit, but will also benefit the global scientific community in understanding the sun.
- There is currently no satellite imaging the sun from space.
- Aditya-L1 will carry seven payloads.

Important terms:
- Solar cycle - an occurrence in which sunspots form on the face of the sun, growing in size and number and eventually diminishing, all over a period of eleven years. It will be a mission of many firsts.
- The L1 point is 1.5 million kilometres away. Here, due to the delicate balance of gravitational forces, the satellite will require very little energy to maintain its orbit. Also, it will not be eclipsed from the sun.
- The corona is the outer layer that we see during total solar eclipses.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/here-comes-the-sun-watcher-indias-aditya-l1/article20942099.ece

15th Finance Commission

Part of: Mains GS Paper III - Indian Economy and issues relating to planning

Key pointers:
- NK Singh will be the chairman of the 15th Finance Commission (FC)
- The FC will recommend distribution of taxes between the Centre and the states.
- The Commission will work on the principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India and the sums to be paid to the States by way of grants-in-aid of their revenues under Article 275 of the Constitution.
- The Commission will also suggest measures to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats and Municipalities.
- The government has further tasked the Commission to suggest a fiscal consolidation roadmap for the Centre and the states.

About FC:
- Finance Commission is a body set up under Article 280(1) of the Constitution.

- It is formed every five years to recommend principles governing the allocation of tax revenue between the Centre, states and local bodies.
- Its primary job is to recommend measures and methods on how revenues need to be distributed between the Centre and states.
- The recommendations of the previous 14th Finance Commission, chaired by former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Y V Reddy, are valid from 2015 to 2020. The recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission will be implemented for the period starting 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2025.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/nk-singh-appointed-chairman-of-15th-finance-commission-4957499/

Seven principles of a good data protection law

Part of: Mains GS Paper II - Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Key pointers:
- The Justice BN Srikrishna Committee, set up by the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, was tasked with writing a draft data protection law. It published a white paper on data protection framework.
- The seven key principles mentioned on which such a framework could be based upon in the country include:

  1. Technology agnostic law.
  2. Be applicable to the private sector and the government.
  3. Informed and meaningful consent.
  4. Minimal and necessary data processing.
  5. Data controller must be accountable for any processing.
  6. Establishing a high-powered statutory authority for enforcement, supported by a decentralised enforcement mechanism.
  7. Penalties for wrongful data processing to ensure deterrence

- It envisions three main objectives of a data protection authority:

  1. Monitor, investigate and enforce the laws.
  2. Set the standards.
  3. Generate awareness in an increasingly digitised society.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/data-protection-framework-srikrishna-committee-suggests-7-key-principles-setting-up-of-authority-4957720/

World's smallest data recorder made of bacteria

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:
- Researchers have converted a natural bacterial immune system into the world's smallest data recorder.
- This achievement lays the groundwork for a new class of technologies that use bacterial cells for everything from disease diagnosis to environmental monitoring.
- The researchers modified an ordinary laboratory strain of the microbe Escherichia coli, enabling the bacteria to not only record their interactions with the environment but also time-stamp the events.

Micro applications:
- Such bacteria, swallowed by a patient, might be able to record the changes they experience through the whole digestive tract, yielding an view of previously inaccessible phenomena.
- Environmental sensing and basic studies in ecology and microbiology, where bacteria could monitor otherwise invisible changes without disrupting their surroundings.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-life/worlds-smallest-data-recorder-made-of-bacteria/article20825880.ece

India to implement Hong Kong Convention

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Hong Kong Convention:
- India has drafted legislation to implement the 'Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships'.
- The Hong Kong convention was adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in 2009.
- The Convention is yet to come into force as it has not been ratified by 15 states, representing 40 per cent of the world merchant shipping by gross tonnage (capacity). Only six countries – Norway, Congo, France, Belgium, Panama and Denmark — have ratified it.
- The IMO Convention does not prohibit the beaching method which is followed in India.

Indian context:
- It will make the ship recycling industry safe for its workers and the environment

- India follows the beaching method to dismantle ships, which is often criticised for its lax safety and health aspects. Under this method, ships are first grounded and then dismantled.
- India is upgrading the world's largest stretch of ship-breaking beaches on Alang-Sosiya in Gujarat's Bhavnagar district through a $76-million soft loan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/india-pledges-to-ratify-imos-convention-on-recycling-of-ships/article9976887.ece

Municipal Bonds

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Key pointers:
- Credit rating agency Crisil is expecting proactive urban local bodies (ULBs) raising about Rs. 6,000 crore via the municipal bond issuance market route.
- The issuance will be on the back of policy and regulatory facilitation.
- Several ULBs have initiated their bond issuance process by appointing transaction advisors. And, in June this year, the Pune Municipal Corporation raised Rs. 200 crore by issuing 10-year bonds.

Benefits of municipal bonds route:
- Bonds offer ULBs structuring flexibility through longer tenures, annual interest payments, and fixed coupon rates compared with bank loans.
- Further, the capital market also has a large investor base, and can turn out to be more competitive than bank borrowing.
- The government's move to develop civic infrastructure across the country through the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and SMART City missions requires significant capital spending by ULBs. These will have to be funded by market borrowings in addition to government grants.

Efforts taken:
- SEBI has notified guidelines on disclosure of financial information by ULBs at regular intervals.
- The government has also announced an interest subsidy scheme to make issuances competitive.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/urban-local-bodies-may-raise-rs-6000-cr-via-municipal-bonds-over-next-3-years-crisil/article9976917.ece

India sitting on a malaria volcano

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

As per World Malaria Report released by WHO:
- In India the malaria surveillance mechanism detects a mere 8 per cent of cases, among the lowest in the world. Despite this, India accounts for 6 per cent of all malaria cases reported globally.
- Countries with weak malaria surveillance systems include India and Nigeria, two major contributors to the global burden of malaria, with 8 per cent and 16 per cent of cases, respectively, detected by the surveillance system.
- "India has the highest malaria burden in the world outside sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burkina Faso.
- India accounted for 58 per cent of all malaria deaths globally.
- A key impediment to eliminating malaria is a weak surveillance system.
- In contrast, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan achieved malaria-free status in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

About malaria:
- Malaria is a potentially life threatening parasitic disease.
- It is caused by parasites known as Plasmodium viviax (P.vivax), Plasmodium falciparum (P.falciparum), Plasmodium malariae (P.malariae) and Plasmodium ovale (P.ovale).
- It is transmitted by the infective bite of Anopheles mosquito.
- The disease has an incubation period of 10-15 days which means a person may develop symptoms after a fortnight of being bitten by an infected mosquito.

The report was brought out by the World Health Organisation noted.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/world-malaria-report-surveillance-india-cases-deaths-4959610/

Bilateral naval agreement between India and Singapore

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:
- Under the agreement, India and Singapore on Wednesday agreed on greater cooperation and activity in the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea

- The agreement includes maritime security, joint exercises and temporary deployments from the naval facilities of each other and mutual logistical support.
- The bilateral naval agreement has provision for mutual logistical support. The agreement would give the Navy the ability for extended deployments in the region.
- Singapore had accepted India's proposal to institutionalise naval engagements in the shared maritime space, including setting up maritime exercises with like-minded countries and other ASEAN partners.
- The two countries also agreed to explore joints projects in research and development.
- The agreement is significant as the strait is considered a critical choke point for global commerce and is seen by China as a vulnerability for its energy security.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/singapore-offers-india-logistical-base/article21135091.ece