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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 **31ST edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **December 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/

"YES. I. CAN. YES. I. WILL."

All the Best ☺

INDEX

PRELIMS + MAINS FOCUS = VALUE REVISIONS

NATIONAL

India: The Hungry Nation

'An empty stomach is not a good political advisor.' —Albert Einstein
Per capita food production in India has increased by 26% (2004-05 to 2013-14)
It has doubled in the last 50 years.
This kind of growth rate in food production is expected to reduce hunger significantly over time. However, Global Hunger Index (GHI) report prepared by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) shows India's hunger level in very poor light.

What does the Global Hunger Index (GHI) report highlights?
- The 2017 GHI score has ranked India 100 out of the 119 countries listed.
- India is identified as one among the worst performers and underachievers in addressing food and nutrition security.
- India's 2017 GHI score is at the high end of the 'serious' category, and is one of the main factors pushing South Asia to the category of worst performing region on the GHI this year.
- As of 2015-16, more than a fifth [21%] of children in India suffer from wasting [low weight for height] — up from 20% in 2005-2006.
- India's child wasting rate has not shown any substantial improvement over the past 25 years.
- India has made considerable improvement in reducing its child stunting rate, down 29% since 2000, but even that progress leaves India with a relatively high stunting rate of 38.4.

Despite improvements, India still faces a problem of undernourishment and poor child health. India's high ranking on the Global Hunger Index [GHI] again this year brings to the fore the disturbing reality of the country's stubbornly high proportions of malnourished children.
Even with the massive scale up of national nutrition-focused programmes in India, drought and structural deficiencies have left large number of poor in India at risk of malnourishment in 2017.

About Global Hunger Index

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger globally and by country and region. Calculated each year by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the GHI highlights successes and failures in hunger reduction and provides insights into the drivers of hunger. By raising awareness and understanding of regional and country differences in hunger, the GHI aims to trigger actions to reduce hunger.

The GHI, now in its 12th year, ranks countries based on four key indicators — the percentage of population that is undernourished; percentage of children under five years who suffer from wasting; percentage of children under five who suffer from stunting, and child mortality.

The report ranked 119 countries in the developing world, nearly half of which have 'extremely alarming,' 'alarming' or 'serious' hunger levels.

Major factors responsible for poor ranking:

Evidence shows that weight and height of children are not solely determined by food intake but are an outcome of a complex interaction of factors related to genetics, the environment, sanitation and utilisation of food intake. The IFPRI acknowledges that only 45% of child mortality is due to hunger or undernutrition.

India's ranking in terms of child mortality, child stunting and child wasting is 80, 106 and 117, respectively.

- Typically, groups with the least social, economic, or political power suffer hunger or malnutrition. This uneven distribution of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms is rooted in inequalities of social, political, and economic power.
- Socioeconomic class and geography intersect with, and often surpass, gender as an axis of inequality. "Power imbalances, often stemming from economic inequalities, are key factors in the way food systems operate". Families' income, social status, and location often appear to play a greater role in determining hunger. Hunger and inequality are inextricably linked.

Recent policy actions:

- India has developed and launched an action plan on 'undernourishment free India' by 2022. The plan shows stronger commitment and greater investments in tackling malnutrition in the coming years.
- Article 47 of the Constitution, inter alia, provides that the state shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which India is a signatory, also cast responsibilities on all state parties to recognise the right of everyone to adequate food.

- The Food Security Bill recognises the right to food which is the aim to a hunger-free nation. The Food security is not just a matter of the availability of food, but even more of the access of households and individuals to sufficient nutritious food.
- By committing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the international community promised to eradicate hunger and reduce inequality by 2030. Yet the world is still not on track to reach this target.

Conclusion:

India today is home to the third largest number of dollar billionaires in the world but, at the same time, harbours within its borders a third of the world's poor and hungry.

It's high time to think whether we have to accept the bullet train or control hunger, malnutrition and child mortality. The governments must actively include in the policy-making process under-represented groups, such as small-scale farmers and disadvantaged groups, to reduce poverty and hunger.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by Global Hunger Index? India comes under the serious category in the report. This is despite multiple schemes launched by the government. Critically discuss the reasons behind.

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

Re-skilling India

Background:

Young and aspirational, the millennial generation that makes up about 40% of India's population has long been regarded as the driver of future economic growth. Yet, the gap between the productive labour force and the employment and entrepreneurial opportunities available to them continues to widen.

Cause of concern:

- The fourth Industrial Revolution has already made its mark on certain sectors. As technology continues to surge forward in leaps and bounds, both blue- and white-collar

jobs will become increasingly sparse. The economic turmoil that could be brought on by further large-scale disruption should be a cause of concern.

- With prestigious and highly regarded Indian sectors such as IT amounting to little more than cyber "coolies", the manufacturing and agricultural sectors are in an even more precarious situation.
- Much of India's workforce is already hampered with outdated and irrelevant skills.

Challenges faced by MSDE:
Policymakers recognize the problem and have taken steps to combat it. The "Skilling India" programme aimed at accelerating the pace of skill development, creating new employment opportunities and reforming India's archaic labour ecosystem is a positive step. However, the challenges faced by the ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship (MSDE) are complex and varied.

- In order to skill 400 million young Indians by 2022, the MSDE is forced to coordinate with 22 departments and ministries at the national level, and many more at the sub-national levels.
- The MSDE also must account for the possibility of intra-state migration, rapid urbanization and possible changes in social fabric as populations react to new job opportunities.

A prime example of the worst-case scenario can be seen with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), an autonomous entity functioning under the MSDE. Tasked specifically with the responsibility of skilling 10 million people by 2020, the NSDC has struggled to achieve its goal.

Way ahead:
If India wishes to avoid economic stagnation and societal upheaval, following needs to be done.

- Additional policy measures must be undertaken to cut through bureaucratic red tape and bring clarity to the policy framework.
- Creating a coherent organizational structure—the NSDC, for example, has been tasked with managing the financing processes while also implementing the skilling programmes. Separating the two tasks and allowing the ministry of finance to manage the financial aspects would allow the NSDC to focus on its core competencies, allowing it to be more effective and efficient.
- MSDE should focus on implementing a multi-skilling aspect to its training programme moving forward.
  As job markets evolve at unprecedented rates, it is incumbent upon the MSDE to provide its trainees with more than one way to earn a living.
- The ministry should also explore the possibility of programmes aimed at skilling and reskilling older "educated" populations that might be left behind owing to disruption and technological advances.

- The curriculum and education system offered also needs to be overhauled. Industry sources claim that close to 90% of trainees have limited understanding of the business sectors they are entering. For many skill programme graduates, the training does very little to prepare them for their day-to-day jobs.
- Targeted initiatives focused on updating skills can help ensure that the training benefits its intended audience. A solutions-based approach, where instructors employ case studies and present relevant problems, would provide students with a holistic education, allowing them to compete at both the national and international levels.
- Implementation of licensing and regulation procedures can also help boost the Indian labour force's chances globally. Most developed nations have systems in place to ensure that electricians, plumbers, agricultural machine operators and other skilled trade workers update their skills regularly through the licensing and regulatory mechanisms. Implementing such a system without creating additional layers of burdensome bureaucracy could be a key difference marker for the Indian labour force moving forward.

Cutting away excessive bureaucratic fat, implementing structural changes to the pedagogy of the skill training system, and installing licensing and regulatory mechanisms are all important steps to help reskill India.

Conclusion:

The most important change needs to happen on a cultural level. Skill training should be viewed as a complementary part of mainstream education, rather than being regarded as an inferior alternative. Otherwise, India's youth will be relegated to the same conditions that their grandparents were subject to.

Connecting the dots:

- The gap between the productive labour force and the employment and entrepreneurial opportunities available to them continues to widen. This is despite the ongoing Skill India mission. Discuss the issues and way forward.

TOPIC:

General Studies 1:

- *Social Issues*

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.*

Reforming criminal administration system in India

Background:

The annual publication of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), "Crime in India 2016", which was released recently, presents a dismal picture of the key performance statistic with only 47% convictions in Indian Penal Code (IPC) crimes at the national level.

Unresolved issues:

Low conviction rates and a lack of a lawful definition of crime mark criminal administration in India.

- Low conviction rates-Case study- In Delhi, DNA testing, which can secure higher conviction rates, is, inexplicably, a low priority. There is only one forensic testing laboratory, with around 9,000 samples pending for examination. Over 5,000 are DNA samples. Delays in this crucial evidence, which plays an important factor in acquittals, are a setback as samples deteriorate with time.
- Systemic issues-Despite the recommendations of Law Commissions and the Supreme Court, as well going by experience in the developed world, we do not have separate wings for investigation of crime and for law and order. In most countries, the prosecutor, and not the police, has discretion on whether to press charges as they involve adjudication. Years ago, the Law Commission had suggested a directorate of prosecution independent of the police to guide investigation.
- There is still controversy over which kinds of conduct are best controlled by the application of criminal law and which kinds by other means. For example, special and local offences account for as much crime as under provisions of the IPC, with nearly 60% of cases under liquor and narcotics offences at the national level. Causing simple and grievous injures under rash driving accounts for 11% of IPC crimes; theft also accounts for 16.6% of IPC crime at the national level.
- The effectiveness of prisons is now being questioned. Nearly two-thirds of the prison population is awaiting trial and half the number of undertrials are normally acquitted. Over 80% of prisoners are sentenced to terms less than three months, 40% are under 30 years old, semi-literate and convicted under special and local acts. Short-term sentences expose such prisoners to criminal indoctrination in jail and social condemnation on release.

Way ahead:

- The focus should really be on reorganising criminal administration. The key statistic of police performance is not merely correct reporting and recording but charge sheets and convictions. Thus the focus should be on reducing conviction rates.
- There is a need to distinguish between accountability and operational responsibility. For example, 'the Mayor of London is responsible for setting policing priorities that will hold the Met Police Commissioner to account. Operational decision-making on day-to-day policing remains the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner. The Police and

Crime Plan 2013-2016 has clear performance measures that focus on results such as 20% reduction in key neighbourhood crimes, 20% reduction in delays in the criminal justice system, and 20% reduction in reoffending by young people leaving custody.

- The criminal justice system should be limited to crimes under the IPC, while enforcement of administrative law and social legislation requires a different approach involving summary trials, changing societal attitudes and modes of behaviour. For example, in Britain part-time lay judges outnumber full-time judges, leaving the judiciary to concentrate on the real crime.

Conclusion:

The main purpose of criminal administration should be the prevention of crime, and the police cannot be an instrument of social change. Administrative measures and fines levied will change behaviour better than penal action.Crime prevention is affected by conviction rate, beat patrolling, and by the police and community working together.

Connecting the dots:

- The main purpose of criminal administration should be the prevention of crime, and the police cannot be an instrument of social change. In this light criminal administration in India needs to go beyond police reforms.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- **Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.**
- **Indian Constitution? historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure**

Relooking at EVMs

Background:

In the recent local elections in U.P., the BJP won more in places where there were machines without the concomitant paper trail, and non-BJP parties won more where there were only ballot papers. Not only has the reliability of the machines been questioned, so has the credibility of the EC. It is for the first time in India's electoral history that the EC has been suspected of bias in favour of a ruling party.

Issue with EVMs:The EC has steadfastly maintained that the machines are perfect and that the software has been examined and re-examined by international experts.

On the one hand, to reassert the integrity of the electoral process, the EC has introduced the paper trail for voters to cross-check their votes.

Allegations-

Engineers have shown how the machines can actually be manipulated by remote devices, or by inserting pre-programmed chips, or by selectively tampering with only 20% of them to secure a simple majority. So, only a few constituencies will have those "chosen" machines and that would be enough to tilt the balance in favour of the ruling party. The EC says these allegations are outrageous because the whole system and process have been shown to detractors and the matter is settled. The issue of credibility of EVMs has become quite complicated, with Mayawati, Arvind Kejriwal, and leaders from the Samajwadi Party and the Congress raising serious objections about the functioning of the machines.

Importance of EVMs:

Holding free, fair, and fast elections is a cornerstone of democracy and is guaranteed by the Constitution. Introduction of EVMs by due process of consultation and constitutional amendment in the 1980s and '90s was a step in the right direction to further strengthen the democratic process in India, which is by far the largest democracy in the world with more than 800 million voters.

The following is based on findings of different surveys.

- EVMs led to a significant decline in electoral fraud, particularly in politically sensitive States such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In several constituencies, polling booths were routinely captured under the paper ballot system and ballot boxes were stuffed. As a result, political leaders, instead of working in the larger interest of the public, worked for the private profits of a small fraction of people who had the greatest capacity to commit fraud. Introducing EVMs transformed this. Rigging elections became extremely expensive. Political leaders could no longer do lip service to development; they had to commit to providing public goods and services.
- EVMs led to a significant increase in the provision of electricity, particularly in States that were more prone to electoral violence.
- EVMs empowered those from the weaker sections of society who were victims of political or electoral violence. In particular women, lower castes, and those less educated were more likely to participate in the electoral process when EVMs were used.
- EVMs made the electoral process more competitive. There has been a significant decline in the incidence of re-election, and winning margins have reduced dramatically.

Way forward:

- EVMs have been in place for two decades and it is time to acknowledge that they have failed.
  Some European countries have acknowledged that EVMs have failed. Countries there

started with EVMs and are now going back to the paper ballot. World over, countries are moving to paper ballots. Just as they are giving up on nuclear energy world over, countries realise that EVMs are problematic too, because they carry the risk of being tampered with.

- It is important to keep in mind that all political leaders, irrespective of caste, creed and religion, are driven only by the quest for power and they will use any means to attain it. Hence it is our collective responsibility to ensure that such powers are under check, else it does not take much for elected leaders to become despots.
- Our institutions, the EC, and the courts also share the responsibility to check the powers of popularly elected leaders to ensure that democracy does not become a mobocracy. Even though introduction of EVMs was a step in the right direction, it is not the final destination.
- The idea of trying to control electoral and political process with the help of technology is quite old. To overcome the dangers of manipulation, we must remain sceptical and accept the reality that the EVM issue is not simple. The fact that the issue is complicated necessitates a measure of caution in its application.

Conclusion:

We must remain skeptical and accept the reality that the EVM issue is far from settled. While it would be a retrograde step to roll back EVMs, we must not lower our guard. The very idea of democracy is based on trust and belief in the fairness of the electoral process where the losing party lives to fight another day. Any erosion of this trust and belief would be an irreversible process with an uncertain outcome.

Connecting the dots:

- The reliability on EVMs is in question. Discuss the reasons behind and the way forward.
- In the light of recent issues related to EVMs, do you think rollig back EVMs would be a retrograde step. Critically analyze.

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:

- *Banking & related Issues; Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*
- *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it*

Aadhaar: Financial Inclusion or Exclusion

Background:
The deadline for linking Aadhaar number to bank accounts, demat accounts, mutual fund folios, life and general insurance policies, credit cards and post office account has been extended to March 31 2018.

Rule shift:
- Aadhaar earlier was supposed to be compulsory only for citizens availing themselves of welfare schemes funded from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Though Aadhaar's original intent was to enable targeted subsidy delivery, the Centre has since decided to use it as a tool to track down black money.

Curbing black money:
In June, the new Prevention of Money Laundering (Maintenance of Records) Second Amendment Rules 2017 was notified. This required all financial firms to compulsorily collect Aadhaar and PAN details for Know-Your-Client requirements. If a client doesn't possess an Aadhaar number, she must furnish proof that she has applied for one. Only those who are 'not eligible' to apply for Aadhaar are off the hook.
Following this notification, regulators such as the RBI, SEBI and IRDA have 'advised' financial market participants to proceed with Aadhaar-linking.

Problems in complying with the Aadhaar:
- **Time-consuming-** Aadhaar-PAN linking on IT returns was a two-step process, but linking Aadhaar to all of one's financial savings entails well over a dozen steps. The process is time-consuming because key financial product providers and their regulators have not managed to create a centralised registry for investors.
- **Digital divide-** Using the online mode for Aadhaar-linking requires familiarity with digital banking, a robust internet connection and uninterrupted phone/email access. This poses severe problems for senior citizens and the poor who lack digital access. Even digitally savvy folk often find their attempts stymied by name/address mismatches between their investment accounts and the Aadhaar database.
- **Security risks-** The Aadhar Act 2016 takes a very serious view of misuse of collected data or the breach of confidentiality. The UIDAI is prohibited from sharing your biometric or demographic details with anyone, except under Court orders or national security considerations. Entities that collect Aadhaar are required to inform about the purpose, use it only for verification and refrain from storing or disseminating it. The Act specifies 3 years' imprisonment and fines for any breach. But while the statute appears fool-proof, enforcing it is the uphill task.

- **Biometric failures-** Many Indian savers, despite being quite willing to enrol for Aadhaar find themselves unable to do so because their biometrics fail to read at the Aadhaar touchpoints.

  Folk beyond the age 50 complain of enrolments being rejected because their fingerprints have faded with age. Iris scanners are not widely available, and are known to trip up too. Biometric failures also foil attempts by the disabled or those engaged in physical labour from securing Aadhaar. The UIDAI dashboard reveals that, on a random recent day, its pan-India enrolment network rejected 1 application for every 7 that it accepted.

Conclusion:

The present government has achieved phenomenal success with financial inclusion, mainly because it has simplified the on-boarding process for aam aadmis seeking to open bank accounts. It would be an irony indeed if the Aadhaar, which has been so effectively used as an instrument of inclusion, now turns into an instrument for financial exclusion of Indian savers.

Connecting the dots:

- The Aadhaar, which has been so effectively used as an instrument of inclusion, can turn into an instrument for financial exclusion of Indian savers. Critically analyze.

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*

General Studies 3:

- *Science and Technology? developments and their applications and effects in everyday life*

Antibiotic resistance in the environment

Background:

The 2017 National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance talks about limiting antibiotics in effluent being dumped by drug makers into the environment. This is because when these drugs taint soil and water, the scores of microbes that live there grow drug-resistant. Until now, India's fight against antibiotic-resistance was focussed on getting people to cut down on unnecessary antibiotic consumption. Having too many antibiotics causes bodily pathogens to resist these miracle drugs.

Environment-pathogen link:

Typically, a pathogen can take two routes to antibiotic resistance.

- A pathogen's own genes can mutate spontaneously to help fight the drug. Mutations take time to spread through a bacterial population.
- Horizontal gene transfer- is for the bug to borrow resistance genes from its neighbours.

Scientists believe that many human pathogens today picked up their resistance genes from the environment.

Horizontal gene transfer: Examples

- Ciprofloxacin-
  Take ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic launched by the German company Bayer in the mid-1980s. Ciprofloxacin was the most effective among the quinolone class of antibiotics in fighting gram-negative bacteria. A bacteria would need multiple resistance mutations to fight cipro, and because such multiple mutations are rare, scientists thought resistance was unlikely. Yet, within a decade, ciprofloxacin resistance had spread globally. Eventually, scientists learnt that bacteria seemed to have borrowed a gene, which conferred resistance to ciprofloxacin, from a sea and freshwater bacterium.
- Another set of genes, which triggered an epidemic of resistance to some cephalosporin antibiotics in the early 21st century, came from a soil-dwelling species.

Resistance genes in environmental microbes:

When humans starting manufacturing antibiotics in the 1950s, a dramatic shift occurred. Large doses of these drugs seeped into the environment through poultry and human excreta, and waste water from drug makers and hospitals. This led to an explosion of resistance genes in soil and water microbes Investigators in 2007 had found that water in an Indian pharma effluent treatment plant had both high levels of antibiotics as well as novel resistance genes, never seen in microbes elsewhere.

Way forward:

The resistant genes are likely to make the journey from living harmlessly in environmental bacteria to human pathogens that sicken people. The flow of genes from the environment to humans is a rare event. Instead, most transmission happens from one human to another. But the rarity isn't reason to lower our guard. We live in unprecedented times where environmental bacteria, pathogens and antibiotics are mixing like never before. This means such rare events are almost inevitable.

Conclusion:

If India doesn't move quickly, wastewater in pharma clusters could give rise to new genes as dangerous as NDM-1. Once such genes enter in humans, they will spread across the planet.

Connecting the dots:

- Antibiotic resistance in the air should worry us. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.*
- *Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

Internet freedom in India

In news: freedom House's annual report on internet freedom points to a growing concern. India has maintained its score of 41 out of 100 (the score works on an inverted scale) and a rating of, "partly free".

Reasons for increase in the overall score:

- The Union government, as well as the Telecom Regulatory Authority, are to be commended for bringing the internet to more Indians. India continues to add more internet subscribers, the speed of internet connectivity continues to rise, and the price per megabyte continues to fall.
- The Supreme Court cleared the cloud over the fundamental right to privacy in the **Puttaswamy   judgement,2017.**
  The status of privacy as a fundamental right was brought into dispute by the government not only to advance the Aadhaar programme but as an argument for a more considerable exertion   of   state   power.
  The Puttaswamy judgement itself notes an affirmative state obligation to bring in a law to protect citizens against the harms of data collection, analysis and disclosure. Even though a government-appointed committee, under Justice B.N. Srikrishna, promises to bring in a data protection law to fill this vacuum, there exists a lack of civil society representation and transparency in the committee itself.
- In several instances, continuing gains for free expression online are credited in the report to the   **Shreya   Singhal   judgement,   2015**.
  By this decision, the SC struck down Section 66A and also made court and executive orders mandatory for removing online content.
- The comprehensive methodology of the report, which allocates a quarter of its points for improvement and deepening of access.

Issues:

Given the primacy of digital services and data-driven state policies in our networked lives, an ambition for higher control without proper safeguards is a significant concern.

- Restrictions on content and violation of user rights.
- While India has traditionally blocked individual websites, shutting down all internet traffic is a practice which has now gained official notoriety. An influential study by the Brookings Institute demonstrated India imposed at least 22 internet shutdowns last year — globally the highest. The Freedom House report notes the figure for the reporting year has reached at least 37 individual instances.
- Rules notified in September by the government detail a bureaucratic process and formalise the legal sanction for issuing shutdown orders. Such restrictions on access correspond with continuing arrests for sharing content and messaging that criticises state policies or political satire.
- Repeated parliamentary questions on the number of internet shutdowns remain unanswered and the National Crime Records Bureau's annual publication, Crime in India, that contains a separate chapter on "cybercrimes", is of little help because it lacks details.
- At present, the fundamental right to privacy applies in litigation, but meaningful safeguards that are implemented pro-actively remain absent in India.

Conclusion:

A rating of "partly free" is not a passing grade for a democracy that values digital rights. It seems the government is striking a discordant note with its executive actions and legislative policy to the increase in internet access and the SC protecting free expression and privacy online in critical cases.

Connecting the dots:

- Freedom House's annual report on internet freedom highlights worrying trends in India. Discuss.

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*

Regulating the private healthcare

Background:

Private healthcare in India in recent times has seen a series of scandals. Recent one being a private hospital handing over a dead infant who was thereafter discovered to be still alive.

Challenge:

- Costly private healthcare in a poor country where public health service is totally inadequate is a worrying issue.
- High commission rates. Reportedly, doctors get a referral fee of 35 per cent for MRI tests and 20 per cent for CT scans and other diagnostic tests.
- Private healthcare is fighting back too. Doctors in Karnataka organised public protests and changes were made in the final legislation removing the provision for imprisonment as a punishment.

Steps being taken by the governments:

- West Bengal has instituted a regulatory commission.
- Karnataka has amended and strengthened its 2007 regulation.
- The union health ministry has written to all States asking them to adopt its 2010 framework, which many have not till now.
- A few months ago the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority imposed price ceilings on stents and knee replacements which brought down their costs to patients by over half.

Regulating the sector:

- Regulation of private healthcare, when it is the mainstay, is a must. But India is notorious for bureaucratic and rent-seeking regulation. Even the best doctors with enormous experience make mistakes. The system can hardly work if they begin to play safe.
- For regulation to work, it has to have a light touch, be quick with findings and give the benefit of doubt where due.
- The regulatory body has to be high-powered, politically independent and represent all sections of stakeholders, particularly patients and NGOs active in the field.
- The regulator should insist on transparency — hospitals clearly publicising their rates for standard treatments and procedures.
- There should be normative rates for different types of hospitals as not all private hospitals are posh or located in costly cities.
- Hospitals should publicise standard packages and rationale for additional charges levied recorded. The regulator should get regular data on the percentage of deviation from standard packages.

Checking commissions:

Doctors are the anchors of the healthcare system and most societies hold doctors in high esteem. Conversely, unethical practices cannot be widespread without the active participation of doctors. The foremost job of regulators should be to ensure that doctors are not paid commissions for referring patients to diagnostic centres or bringing them to hospitals.

- Many hospitals pay a commission to consultants on the bills run up by patients who are under their supervision.
- While inducements offered by pharma companies are easier to track and prevent, commissions paid by diagnostic centres and hospitals are more difficult to track. The code of ethics of the Medical Council of India for professionals disallows this but it seems a dead letter.
- The payment of commission to doctors creates adverse incentives. The more a doctor recommends diagnostic tests or that a patient should be kept longer in the ICU, the more he earns.

Way out:

- One way in which hospitals can avoid paying commission to consultants is not to have outside consultants, engage them full time and pay them a salary.

Solving information asymmetry:

- In healthcare there is an asymmetry of information.
- Across the world religious and secular nonprofit hospitals carry a big healthcare load. They seek to function professionally, relying mostly on philanthropy to meet their deficits. Getting global funding for healthcare related NGOs is becoming difficult as the economy booms and India is no longer seen as very poor. The central government's policy on foreign funding for NGOs is another hurdle.

Conclusion:

Poor private healthcare sector in a country where public healthcare system has terribly failed is a serious issue in India. Regulating private sector is thus the need of the hour.

Connecting the dots:

- Private healthcare sector must be regulated. Critically analyze.

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

- *Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices*
- *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.*

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*

Policy reforms in Agricultural sector

Background:

Last year, India's production was 23 million tonnes (MT), the highest ever, 40% more than the previous year. This was owing to good rains, higher minimum support price (MSP) and higher acreage.

High production should have meant lower imports. But, last year's imports were at an all-time high of 6.6 MT, that too at zero import duty. This caused prices to crash, in some places to half of the MSP. Farmers faced ruin.

Procurement of pulses by the government doesn't helps because of the glut and limited storage and fiscal space.

The policy lessons:
- Firstly, there is no instrument for using future price information. Farmers plant crops based on anticipated future prices, not past prices. If futures trading in pulses was allowed, it may have helped in reducing volatility, and garnering some benefits for farmers.
- Secondly, there are arbitrary stock limits for private traders, which can inhibit inter-period smoothening of prices. In the absence of futures trading, the volatility at times is as high as 48%..
- Thirdly, for the past 10 years, all exports of pulses have been banned. This was presumably for food security and price stability.
  But this export ban has hurt farmers, who couldn't take advantage of high prices. When prices of food crops go up, the Central government swings into action, clamping down on exports, bringing in zero-duty imports, imposing stocking and storage limits, and so on. But when the opposite happens, that is when prices crash, often, there is no corresponding reverse rescue.
  Among all World Trade Organization members, India is among a handful of countries with negative protection of agriculture.
- Lastly, pulses continue to be in the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act. Thus. farmers are not free to sell to any buyer they wish but must go through the APMC.

Significance of pulses:
- Pulses are an important source of protein in India.

- Almost one-fifth of total acreage is used to grow them.
- They are also an important source of soil fertility since they provide nitrogen through fixation.
  Indeed, a pulses plant is called a mini fertilizer factory.

Lack of self-sufficiency:

Pulses were part of the six technology missions created in the 1980s (they were added to the oilseeds mission), to greatly enhance their production, use of technology and processing. But despite the mission-mode approach, India is still not self-sufficient in pulses production. Farmers continue to be at the mercy of nature, markets and government policies.

Policy-induced distortion:

Agriculture is an arena where policy-induced distortion is the rule, not an exception.

- The story of pulses is repeated across various crops. In cashew, India's Kollam used to be the world's capital, but has lost out to Vietnam due to its failure to adopt technology and due to excessive government control.
- India pioneered the Green Revolution, but scores very poorly in the global hunger index. The monolithic nationwide policies of promoting and procuring wheat and rice have ultimately proved harmful to health, nutrition and environment (through soil salinity).
- Coarse cereals, the staple of most rural folk, were largely ignored by the public distribution system, and are only now being introduced in the midday meal schemes.
- The maze of subsidies in credit, inputs, outputs, water and electricity is a patchwork to act as an antidote to various price and quantity controls, which have an urban/consumer/anti-farm bias.
- Even policies like prohibition of foreign direct investment in retail hurt the farmer.
- Farm distress is chronic, and occasionally manifests in its most acute form as farmer suicides. Loan waiver to farmers is yet another reaction to policy-induced indebtedness, which has much deeper roots.

Larger issues:

- The various farm subsidies were cornered mostly by large farmers. Even free or subsidized electricity, or cheap credit, benefits larger farmers.
- Subsidies also created distortions like overuse of urea, leading to soil salinity, and free power creating a hole in distribution company balance sheets.
- The single instrument of public procurement and distribution was supposed to achieve three goals:
  1. Ensure adequate prices to farmers,
  2. Keep food prices low and stable and
  3. Ensure food security to the nation.

This too has had very limited success. Farm incomes did not rise proportionate to gross domestic product or industry.

- We have recently had two consecutive years of a serious drought. The blight of farmer suicides is still with us. Farm income growth since 2011-12 has dipped to 1% or below, which is the main factor behind rural distress.
- Job creation in the rest of the economy is woefully inadequate. A national survey showed that 40% of those in farming would gladly leave, if only they can find a stable job outside.
- The farm sector does not have a focused lobbying voice. Perhaps this is because the sector is too large and fragmented, and now exposed to globalization.

The agriculture sector needs to be unshackled:
- Export restrictions and monopoly procurement must go.
- Essential Commodities Act restrictions and arbitrary stocking limits must go.
- Compulsory sale through the APMC must go.
- Prohibition on money-lending to farmers, tenancy farming, land leasing, land transfers, all must go (with reasonable and appropriate safeguards).
- We also need a comprehensive, well-designed crop and price insurance market for farmers.

Conclusion:

After 69 years of independence, we still have more than half the population depending on farming and related activities for their livelihood. India, with its vast continental size, will have to forge a new path in achieving the rural-urban, industry-agriculture balance, unlike the trajectories followed by Western nations. Removing the anti-farm bias in our policies is a crucial prerequisite for this strategy.

Connecting the dots:
- The policies meant for agriculture have induced distortions at multiple levels. Critically analyze.

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.*

Encouraging entrepreneurship in India

Introduction:
Demographic trends in India, the second most populous country in the world, suggest that a million people join the labour force every month. This amounts to 12 million Indians joining the labour force every year, which is more than the entire population of Sweden. The question arises- Are there enough jobs? More important question is- Who creates jobs?

Issues with Indian entrepreneurship:
- Slow pace of entrepreneurship- India produces too few entrepreneurs for its stage of development. The pace of creation of new businesses and new start-ups in India is low compared to the rest of the world ("Entrepreneurship, Growth And Job Creation, In Reshaping Tomorrow", World Bank). A slow pace of entrepreneurship is associated with a slow pace of job creation. A detailed examination of enterprise in 600 districts in India confirms the strong relationship between new start-ups and subsequent job growth. Districts in India that embraced entrepreneurship have experienced faster job growth.
- Lopsided entrepreneurship- There is huge heterogeneity in entrepreneurship within India, with new establishments concentrated in a few places. There is extensive evidence of agglomeration economies. For a city, start-ups are more frequent in industries that share common labour needs or have customer-supplier relationships with the city's incumbent businesses.

Which district traits encourage local entrepreneurship? The two most consistent policy factors that predict overall entrepreneurship in a district are:
- Its local education levels. The link between education and entrepreneurship has strong roots. Education improves skill and spreads ideas more quickly.
- The quality of local physical infrastructure. Good physical infrastructure is essential to supporting entrepreneurship, economic growth and job creation. Goods and services cannot be produced, or jobs created, without access to roads, electricity, telecommunication, water, education and health.

Way forward:
Narrowing the knowledge gap and strengthening infrastructure-
- Programmes that promote education in poorer districts can increase the supply of potential entrepreneurs, provide broader benefits to the communities, and enhance equity. There are limits to the pace at which India can accumulate physical capital and invest in physical infrastructure, but there is no limit to the speed with which India can close the gap in knowledge.

- Policymakers have the responsibility of providing infrastructure.

Districts become more competitive when they are livable, have good infrastructure, are well-governed, invest more in urban knowledge generation and capacity- building and work through strengthened public and private partnerships at the local, national, and international levels. They will attract more entrepreneurs and create more jobs

Focusing on areas where future of jobs lies:
- The jobs challenge faced by India will be shaped not just by how India invests in physical and human infrastructure, but by global trends towards increasing use of digital technologies. Many more new jobs will be created in modern services.
- The future of jobs will be driven more by education and skills than in the past. Policymakers will need to introduce innovations in the content and delivery of education. The potential of technology-enabled solutions, supported by a stronger foundation of digital literacy, will go a long way in putting the future of jobs on a stronger footing.
- India's strength in entrepreneurship lies in its small enterprises. They are now well integrated in global supply chains. Thus, there is a need to promote small enterprises.
- Women-headed entrepreneurship will become the new driver of job growth in the future. The schemes like Standup India needs to be implemented in an effective manner.

Conclusion:

The policy message on entrepreneurship and job growth is simple. Local governments wanting to promote pro-entrepreneurial growth should focus less on firm-casing —attracting large mature firms from somewhere else—and focus more on encouraging entrepreneurship in their community. Districts that have a higher level of local education and better quality of local infrastructure will attract many more entrepreneurs and create many more jobs.

Connecting the dots:
- Local governments wanting to promote job growth should focus on encouraging entrepreneurship in their community and this can be done by ensuring better education and better quality of local infrastructure. Discuss.

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*

Workplace Equality

Background:
#metoo campaign-
A blog post chronicling Susan Fowler's experiences as a female engineer at Uber set in motion events that led to the chief executive officer's dismissal. From that lone voice almost a year back, the conversation around workplace harassment has now become mainstream. With the #metoo campaign bringing to the surface a new name every week, thousands of women all over the world are openly sharing experiences of the harassment they have faced in society and in the workplace.

Fallouts of harassment at workplace:
- The careers of many women gets stunted or destroyed by such behaviour.
- The loss of talent is real. According to one data, about 80% of women who experience harassment leave their jobs within two years. Their research also indicates that a woman's career stagnates after she experiences harassment at the workplace. These women often choose to work in an environment perceived to be safer, but perhaps disconnected from their field of interest.
- There is also a long-term cost on a woman's well-being. Successive studies have documented the mental health impacts of being a victim, from depression to loss in confidence. More importantly, scientists have found evidence that harassment early in the career has long-term effects on depressive symptoms.
- It's not just the employee that suffers. In the US, employers paid about $125 million in the past two years to settle claims through the equal employment opportunity commission (EEOC).

In Indian context:
- Unlike the US, India doesn't have a body overseeing workplace equality. The sexual harassment law, while welcome, is fairly recent, with little or no oversight. It's not easy to bring class-action suits to hold powerful men accountable. The burden of reporting harassment at work or in society lies on the individual facing it. Faced with the prospect of a long and frequently insensitive legal recourse, most women choose to move on. In the process, their careers suffer.
- Policymakers frequently lament the dismal number of women students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. Girls formed only 8% of the total students enrolled in the Indian Institutes of Technology in 2016.

A recent study of over 4,000 students from the University of Delhi showed that women are more likely to choose a college that is perceived to have a safer commute, even if it isn't the top choice academically.

Way ahead- Increasing the diversity:

- Women, not men, are the solution for solving the issue of sexual harassment. The increasing number of women in leadership positions has a direct effect in preventing harassment.
- In male-dominated industries such as mining or construction, far more women report sexual harassment than in other fields. In comparison, female-dominated and gender-balanced fields, such as education, shows less tolerance of hostile behaviour.
- The correlation is more pronounced with underrepresented groups. Male-dominated management teams are more likely to tolerate, sanction or even expect, aggressive behaviour from peers. This leads to what we often call the 'bro-culture'—a culture of complicity where complaints are not taken seriously. Companies with a diverse leadership are more sensitive to such complaints.

Conclusion:

If the #metoo movement is to be a watershed in workplace equality, the harasser, not the harassed, should suffer the consequences. Perhaps it's time to consider safety along with social and economic variables to explain the skewed gender ratio.

Connecting the dots:

- Safety is an important variable that explains skewed gender ratio in India. Analyze.
- For ensuring workplace equality an important step would be ensuring diversity. Discuss.
- The #metoocampaign showed how thousands of women all over the world have faced harassment in society and in the workplace. Discuss the negative effects of harassment on those harassed. Also suggest way forward.

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

Need for Green maifesto

In news: According to the just-released Global Carbon Budget report, India is expected to record a two-per cent increase in carbon emission this year. The PM (particulate matter) pollution levels reached alarming levels, with the children and the elderly facing the risk of

permanent lung defects, forcing schools to be shut down and sales of air masks and purifiers going through the roof during Diwali month in capital city of Delhi. In a span of a month, as a country and as a capital, we have tried to deal with the issue of air pollution in myriad ways — from domestic use of mild explosives, farmer stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana and vehicle emissions.

Caring about environment- both good politics and good governance:
As large parts of the northern and central India struggle to breathe, it is time to bring a breath of fresh air to the pollution problem. While civil society and citizens can and do play a critical role in solving environmental issues, institutional action is critical — from political establishments and the executive alike. Caring about the environment has now become both good politics and good governance. Why?

- Pollution costs India dearly — according to the Lancet Commission, 2.51 million Indians died in 2015 due to pollution-related causes. We rank No. 1 in pollution-related deaths and 25 per cent of all deaths are caused due to pollution.Moreover, according to a 2013 World Bank report, air pollution alone costs India 8.5 per cent of its GDP due to welfare costs and lost labour income.
- Pollution has also entered the public discourse. Indians (especially urban Indians) are now increasingly concerned with the issue.Social media outrage, memes and other forms of satire on the subject shows a clear trend. Rigorous surveys tend to corroborate the mood — as per a 2015 Pew Research, 73 per cent of Indians were "very concerned" about global climate change.

Way forward:
- Firstly, there is a need for a Green Manifesto when political parties gear up for elections at least in urban India. Not only is that a moral imperative, it is also tactically suave. The recent manifestos of most major parties did not give sufficient space to a green agenda. There is a need to have a separate environment vision document especially for urban India.
- Given the recent events political parties should expect environment to become a focal campaign point, at least in cities. A glimpse of this coming change can be seen in some of the more recent documents albeit from relatively young political parties.
- There are lessons to be learnt from the west. In the American context, candidates are compelled to articulate their respective positions on the matter.
- There is a need for an environment roadmap from the administration and the executive. The Niti Aayog could set green goals akin to the UNDP's Millennium Development Goals.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) needs to be revamped and armed with more scientists and environmentalists. As some have suggested India should have a federal

green agency akin to the US EPA. Certain government measures are welcome steps —
for example, the vision to sell only Electric Vehicles by 2030.

A developing country which continues to face dual challenges of unemployment and poverty,
needs to balance environment concerns with needs for rapid large-scale industrialisation.
That economic engine along with accelerated urbanisation will put immense pressure on India's
Green Report card — and that is a juggling act political leaders and administrators will need to
master.

Conclusion:

Every Indian has a right to life and according to **Articles 21 & 48** of the Constitution, a clean
environment is part of that right. Neglecting pollution concerns not only violates fundamental
rights but it also has economic, human and political costs. The Indian voter is ready with open
doors for an environment conscious politician to walk in. But this time, the concern has to be
real, the manifesto substantial and the promises delivered.

Connecting the dots:

- Caring about environment is both good politics and good governance. In this light, there
  is a need for green manifesto in India.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.*
- *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 or Services relating to
  Health, Education, Human Resources.*

Regulating private hospitals in India

In news: Private hospitals have been in the news lately for all the wrong reasons.
The Delhi Government has cancelled the license of Max Hospital, finding the hospital
administration guilty of medical negligence. Fortis Gurugram presented a bill of Rs. 16 lakh for
the 15-day dengue treatment of seven-year-old Adya who lost her life subsequently.
Instances of suspected medical negligence and exorbitant bills are not unusual. The problem
needs a systemic and sustained solution.

Rules and beyond

- The Clinical Establishments Act, 2010 was enacted by the Centre for registering and regulating all types of public and private clinical establishments in the country, including single-doctor clinics. Thus far, the Act has been adopted by Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam; however, it has taken effect only in four States, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim.

- Healthcare in India is plagued by tremendous information asymmetry. Patients as buyers of healthcare services and doctors as providers are definitely not equal players. Patients and their families often have little choice but to assume that their doctor knows best.

- While we can put in place external checks and balances, the need for the medical profession to self-regulate and adhere to the highest ethical standards is most important.
  In this regard, the role of the Medical Council of India (MCI) has been grossly inadequate.

- The Act provides for the creation of a regulatory authority at the State and district levels. Other key elements include the grading of clinical establishments, adoption of standard treatment guidelines and protection of patient rights.

- The National Health Policy, 2017 recommends the setting up of an empowered medical tribunal for the timely resolution of complaints pertaining to medical negligence, excessively high cost of treatment and unfair practices.

Way forward:

- The adoption and implementation of this Act in letter and spirit will be a significant step towards curbing malpractices such as overcharging and minimising instances of negligence.

- Citizens also need to be empowered so that they understand their rights and the recourse available to them in case something goes wrong.It is, therefore, imperative that citizens are educated about diseases, possible complications and approximate treatment costs.

- In some parts of the country Jan Sunwais are organised during which citizens have the opportunity to report their experiences with health providers in the presence of government officials, NGOs and community leaders.Such interventions should be replicated as they not only increase citizen participation but also make health governance more accountable and responsive to local communities.

- The National Medical Commission Bill, 2016 proposes to address the issue of medical ethics.
  It emphasises the need for developing a competency-based dynamic curriculum in

consultation with stakeholders such that medical graduates not only have appropriate knowledge and skills, but also values and ethics for providing health care. It proposes to establish the Board for Medical Registration which will also be responsible for prescribing the standards of professional conduct and framing a Code of Ethics for medical practitioners.

- We need to focus on building a strong public health system. The National Health Policy, 2017 and NITI Aayog's Three-Year Action Agenda make several important recommendations for strengthening public health, including the creation of a focal point in the Union Health Ministry and a dedicated public health cadre, among others. These need to be implemented on a war footing.

Conclusion:

Given India's dual disease burden and the fact that 50 per cent of deaths are now due to non-communicable diseases, we need to do more to keep people healthy and reduce the need for costly hospital treatment. Never before has the proverb prevention is better than cure been more relevant for the country. When it comes to tackling medical negligence or profiteering, one-off actions are unlikely to have a lasting positive impact. We need to attack the roots instead of just hacking at the leaves.

Connecting the dots:

- Given India's dual disease burden and the fact that 50 per cent of deaths are now due to non-communicable diseases, we need to do more to keep people healthy and reduce the need for costly hospital treatment. 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*
General Studies 1:
- *Social empowerment*
- *Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.*

Criminalising triple talaq: Justified or not?

In news: The Centre has proposed to make instant triple talaq an offence punishable with three-year imprisonment and a fine. The proposed Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, has provisions for maintenance or subsistence allowance to the wife and children in the event of triple talaq being pronounced.

Background:

By a three-two majority, the Supreme Court has declared that the practice of talaq-e-biddat, or instant divorce of a Muslim woman by uttering the word 'talaq' thrice, is illegal and unenforceable.

While two judges in the majority said the practice was arbitrary and, therefore, unconstitutional, the third judge ruled that it was illegal because it was contrary to Islamic tenets.

Issue:

- It is an unnecessary attempt to convert a civil wrong into a criminal act. Disagreements in marriage are normally civil matters and injustice to one party, not constituting violence, is best treated as a civil offence. State can step in to resolve differences and ensure equitable terms of disengagement. Criminalising divorce, even an illegal one, would be overreach.

- Instant triple talaq is viewed as sinful and improper by a large section of the community itself. Therefore, there can be no dispute about the need to protect Muslim women against the practice. But it is also well established that criminalising something does not have any deterrent effect on its practice.

- There is no need for a fresh criminal provision when existing laws, under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code or provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, already allow the prosecution of a husband for inflicting physical or mental cruelty, emotional and economic abuse, and for deprivation of financial resources.

- Regardless of whether instant talaq would fall under any of the forms of cruelty or domestic violence under PWDA Act, criminalising it risks defeating the objective of preserving the husband's legal obligations, and the payment of maintenance.

- Irrespective of the government's intent three years in prison of the convicted husband will end up penalising the already aggrieved wife and children too.

- The draconian punishment cannot but aggravate the already acute insecurity and alienation of the Indian Muslim community — its womenfolk included — under the current regime.

- Given the widely acknowledged anti-Muslim bias in a section of the Indian police, there is no guarantee that the new law will not be used against Muslim men.

Way forward:

- The Centre would should reconsider its draft and limit its scope to providing relief to women, instead of creating a new offence out of a civil matter.

- The fine amount under consideration can be awarded as maintenance or subsistence allowance.

- In the best interests of justice to Muslim women it is better to invoke a secular law that already exists: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005. Parliament should pass a law unambiguously stating that the very utterance of the words "talaq, talaq, talaq" would amount to "domestic violence" as defined in the PWDVA. The PWDVA was conceived as a law that ensures speedy relief — ideally within three months — to an aggrieved woman: Right to stay in the marital home, protection against violence, right to maintenance etc.
- Provided the free services of a government-appointed "protection officer" under PWDA would save Muslim women money on hiring a lawyer.
- Government must consult all stakeholders, including the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan. Some Muslim women groups would prefer codification of Muslim personal law rather than piecemeal legislation.

Conclusion:

The right approach would be to launch a massive campaign across India to publicise the Supreme Court judgment. Criminalising acts that do not result in the commission of crimes will be legally untenable.

Connecting the dots:

- Criminalising triple talaq is not justified. Critically analyze.

Also read: Triple Talaq case: the judicial intervention
https://iasbaba.com/2016/10/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-18th-october-2016/

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:

- ***Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.***

Hidden Indian Scientists
Background:
Many of the greatest scientists that independent India has produced are little known in their own   homeland.
Amal Kumar Raychaudhuri in cosmology, G.N. Ramachandran in protein crystal structures, and

C.K. Majumdar and Dipan Ghosh who extended the quantum Heisenberg spin model. These are household names in the international scientific field, but are little promoted by the Indian scientific establishment, even neglected in graduate teaching.

Issues:

- India has numerous well-funded institutions designed to produce high-quality scientific research, but many eminent Indian scientists think the resulting research is mostly mediocre.
- Relatively small amount of world-class research produced emerges despite the national scientific establishment.
- The resistance to a U.S.-returned scientist at times, ensures that the system remained largely unchanged.
- The system is run by scientists-turned-bureaucrats, who have absorbed the culture of government.
  Dependent on political patronage for continued funding, these leaders groom loyalists and yes-men rather than cutting-edge researchers (and women are scarce). This has led to an insider culture, reproducing privileges rather than promoting excellence.
- India's scientific institutions are a blind spot in the state's modernisation project. Owing to a conscious decision at the time of independence, research institutions, which house a numerically small elite, get most of the funding while universities focus mainly on teaching and get very little. Research and teaching are segregated, and both suffer as a result.
- Experimental science "is very poor in India". To succeed, experiments require at least two conditions: guarantees of long-term funding and scientists' collaboration with each other. Funding varies with the political climate: there will be money to buy equipment but no certainty that resources will flow for all the years needed to ensure significant results. And collaboration is lacking among scientists.
- Bureaucrats no longer active in cutting-edge research regard themselves as capable of judging working scientists, dispensing with principles of peer review.

Conclusion:

With globalisation, it is easier to notice the growing contrast between the fame diaspora scientists achieve in the West, and the challenges their counterparts face in their own countries.

India's problem is hardly unique. Durable institutions and cultures of innovation are not widespread in the Global South. But India is the most successful of all the nations in the Global South, with a more affluent diaspora than virtually any other country. There is need of a wider discussion about the career of Indian science, acknowledging

internationally celebrated scientific accomplishments, and asking why they were ignored for so long.

Connecting the dots:

- Many of the greatest scientists that independent India has produced are little known in their own homeland despite being household names in the international fora. Discuss the reasons behind.
- With globalisation, it is easier to notice the growing contrast between the fame diaspora scientists achieve in the West, and the challenges their counterparts face in countries like India. Critically analyze.

TOPIC:
General Studies 3
- *Awareness in the fields of IT, computers,*
- *Challenges to internal security through communication networks, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.*
- *Linkages of organized crime with terrorism.*
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*

Making India Cyber secure

In news: India is the fifth most vulnerable country in the world in terms of cybersecurity breaches, according to the Internal Security Threat Report of 2017 by Symantec. Till June 2017, 27,482 cybersecurity threats had been reported in the country, according to the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team's report. As this is a 23% increase from 2014 figures, it coincides with rapid growth and innovation in the ICT sector.

Rapid growth and innovation in the ICT sector:
- India is one of the key players in the digital and knowledge-based economy, holding more than a 50% share of the world's outsourcing market.
- Pioneering and technology-inspired programmes such as Aadhaar, MyGov, Government e-Market, DigiLocker, Bharat Net, Startup India, Skill India and Smart Cities are propelling India towards technological competence and transformation.
- India is already the third largest hub for technology-driven startups in the world.
- India's Information and Communications Technology sector is estimated to reach the $225 billion landmark by 2020.

Innovation in technology, enhanced connectivity, and increasing integration in commerce and governance also makes India vulnerable to cybersecurity attacks.

Ransomware attacks:

- These have been the most common in the last few years Definition: Ransomware is a type of software that threatens to publish a person's data or block it unless a ransom is paid. Example- Apart from WannaCry and Petya, other Ransomware attacks that made news globally were Locky, Cerber, Bucbi, SharkRaaS, CryptXXX and SamSam.
- In India, in May 2017, a data breach at the food delivery App, Zomato, led to personal information of about 17 million users being stolen and put for sale on the Darknet. The company had to negotiate with the hacker in order to get it taken down. Similarly, hackers stole data from 57 million Uber riders and drivers. Uber paid the hackers $100,000 to keep the data breach a secret.

The attacks aren't limited to mobile phones and e-Pads. All devices, including televisions that use Android, are also potentially vulnerable.

A number of viruses, malware and cryptoworms are also being developed in the JavaScript, which gives the attackers cross-platform options.

Recognizing the issue:

- The government has announced that it will award a grant worth Rs. 5 crore to startups working on innovations in the field of cybersecurity.

The second Global Cybersecurity Index, released by the International Telecommunication Union in July, which measured the commitment of nations to cybersecurity, found that India ranked 23 out of 165 nations.

Way forward:

- India needs to quickly frame an appropriate and updated cybersecurity policy, create adequate infrastructure, and foster closer collaboration between all those involved to ensure a safe cyberspace.
- There must be enhanced cooperation among nations and a global call to action is required for all United Nations member nations to not attack the core of the Internet even when in a state of war.
- More than ever before, there is a need for a Geneva-like Convention to agree on some high-level recommendations among nations to keep the Internet safe, open, universal and interoperable.

Conclusion:

Given the huge number of online users and continued efforts on affordable access, cybersecurity needs to be integrated in every aspect of policy and planning.

Connecting the dots:

- India is the fifth most vulnerable country in the world in terms of cybersecurity breaches. In this light discuss the need of integrating cybersecurity in every aspect of policy and planning and of enhancing cooperation among nations.

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*

Undernutrition & Overnutrition: Tackling the Dual Burden

Introduction:
In the last few decades, with strides in technology, irrigation practices, and extension services, and with progressive agricultural policies, India has seen improvement in food and nutrition security. Agriculture, food grain production, and agricultural export have grown. However, despite hunger (as measured by undernutrition) decreasing, the level of undernutrition remains unacceptably high in the country. India ranks 114th out of 132 countries in stunting among children aged less than five and 120th out of 130 countries in under-5 wasting, as per the Global Nutrition Report, 2016. The burden of vitamin and mineral deficiencies ('**hidden hunger**') is also considerable.

Fallout of micronutrient deficiencies:
Women and children are the most vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies. This has adverse effects on their health.
- Deficiency of iron in women not only reduces physical work capacity and causes fatigue, but could lead to depression and post-partum maternal hemorrhage.
- In children, it impairs growth and cognitive development.

Over-nutrition: Becoming an emergency
What is ironic is that over-nutrition is emerging as an emergency in India. As per the recent findings of the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16), the Body Mass Index (BMI) of 15.5% of urban women was found to be less than 18.5 kg/m2, whereas 31.3% of urban women were in the category of overweight or obese (BMI of or more than 25.0 kg/m2).

Around 15% of urban men were underweight, while 26.3% belonged to the category of overweight and obese.

Reason- Dramatic changes in lifestyle and dietary patterns in recent decades have contributed to an increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases.

Fallout- If this double burden of undernutrition and growing percentage of obesity and associated non-communicable diseases is not controlled, it can have serious implications for the economy.

How has this happened?

The reason behind India facing the burden of under- and over-nutrition at the same time is that a vast majority of Indians eat cereal-based food, mainly wheat and rice.

- There is an insufficient intake of food such as milk, pulses, and fruits and vegetables, which are rich sources of micronutrients.
- While the Green Revolution phase saw new, fast-growing varieties of staples, especially wheat and rice, the following decades saw a steady decline in the food basket diversity, especially of traditional grains such as bajra and millet, which have high nutritional value.

Way forward:

- To ensure food and nutrition security, there is a growing need for a multi-sectoral approach.
- The policies and programmes of various ministries should be converged for better results.
- Apart from transforming India's agricultural practices, we also need to spread awareness about nutritious food among key target groups, including tribals, women and children.
- We need to focus on the role of micronutrients. Deficiencies of micronutrients such as zinc, folic acid, magnesium, selenium and vitamin D needs to be given adequate attention.

Conclusion:

The **Sustainable Development Goal-2**, which aims to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture", is a priority area for India. India needs to take concerted efforts to deal with both the challenges of under and over nutrition at the same time.

Connecting the dots:

- The double burden of undernutrition and growing percentage of obesity and associated non-communicable diseases can have serious implications for the economy. Discuss.
- A multi-sectoral approach is required to ensure food and nutrition security. Analyze.

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:

- *Technology, Energy security.*

India's energy mix: Balancing renewables and non-renewables

Background:

India's energy mix reflects a clear trend towards gas and renewables. Still demand for oil is forecast to grow at least until 2040. However, oil companies are under pressure to prepare for a possible low-carbon future. There is a fear of being too late to embrace newer energy sources, matched by equally high risks in moving too fast.

Leveraging resource advanatge:

Today, the major fossil fuels account for more than 90% of India's total primary commercial energy supply. At present, India's import dependence in the oil and gas sector is significant and the government has set a target to reduce dependence on crude imports by 10% by 2022. The moment is opportune for India to take advantage of shifting pricing and supply dynamics in the oil and gas sector globally. In order to leverage the resources advantage, it should focus on the following areas:

- With softened oil prices there has been a significant decline in the cost of equipment and services associated with exploration and production. The effort of government-owned companies to acquire assets must continue.
- With 3.14 million sq. km of potential reserves lying unexplored until 2016, India's potential in the oil and gas sector is immense and there exists vast headroom for new discoveries.
- Enhancing oil recovery- With the global average recovery factor for a typical oilfield being around 40%, a substantial amount of identified oil ends up as leftover despite existing production infrastructure. There is a need to enhance recovery from oilfields to reduce import dependence.
- Adoption of digitization, automation and robotics, which can substantially reduce operational costs and increase oilfield productivity, should be considered seriously.
- Adding value in petrochemicals: India has emerged as a refining hub in Asia, serving a massive domestic market for refined petroleum products and even exports. Also, the government's push towards a gas-based economy has given significant thrust to liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports, given the low domestic natural gas output. Both these elements present an opportunity for India's downstream and midstream oil and gas sectors. With a slump in global oil and gas prices, refiners and LNG importers have an opportunity to increase their profit by enhancing efficiency in refining and re-gasification of LNG.

- Strengthening sales and distribution networks: With major fuels in India deregulated, retailers must focus on their sale and distribution networks. The current distribution network is concentrated around a few producers, calling for the development of a strong network.

Conclusion:

Indian stakeholders thus need to adopt an aggressive but cautious approach to fully harness the opportunity created as a result of changing dynamics in the global oil and gas sector. We need to adopt a right mix of growth options in conventional and newer energy. This will help India reduce dependence on crude imports.

Connecting the dots:

- Oil companies are under pressure to prepare for a possible low-carbon future. In this light discuss how the state-owned oil companies should move forward.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:

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

General Studies 2:

- *Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders*

Maoist Problem: A permanent solution

Introduction:

The Central Reserve Police Force lost 40 personnel in two Maoist attacks in the first half of 2017 in Sukma, the most severely Maoist-affected district of Chhattisgarh. Though the forces were jolted by these attacks, their spirit to fight back has not dampened. Rather, they continue to undertake challenging development work in the red corridor areas. This shows how the paradigm on tackling Maoism has changed over time. The government's response has matured in terms of deliverance — from reactive it has become proactive, and from localised it has become holistic.

Background:

The **Red Corridor** is the region in the eastern, central and the southern parts of India that experience considerable Naxalite–Maoist insurgency. These are also areas that suffer from the greatest illiteracy, poverty and overpopulation in modern India, and span parts of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, and West Bengal and eastern Uttar Pradesh states.
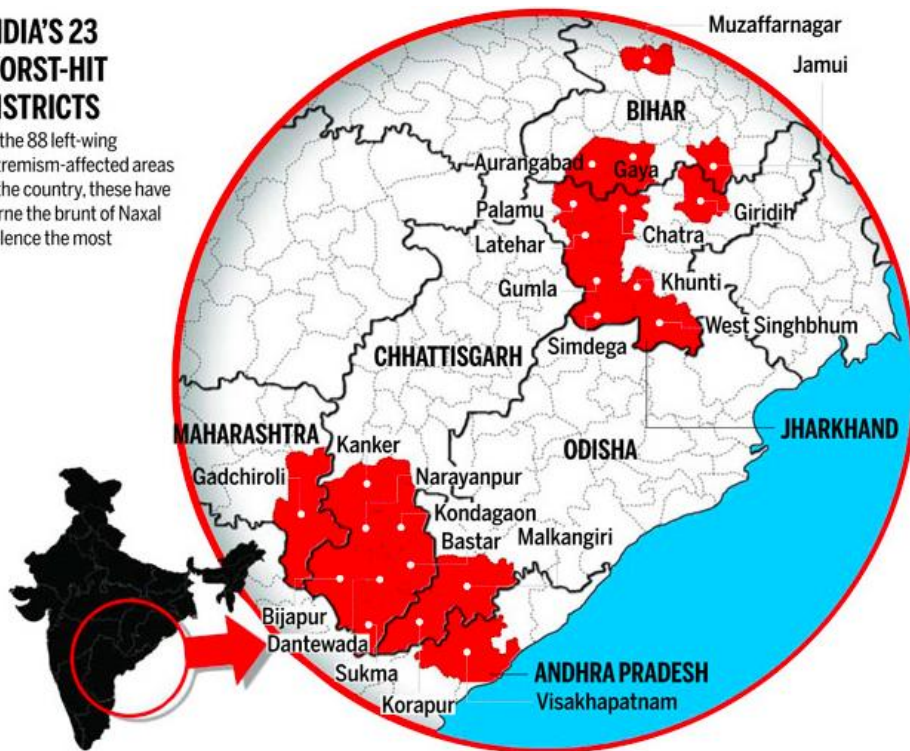
Pic credit: http://indpaedia.com/ind/images/6/61/Districts_affected_by_naxal_violence.jpg

Proactive policing:
Security forces are no longer reactive.
- When the Maoists decided to deepen their roots into Gariaband, the State government notified this division as a new district, which gave a fillip to development work. Many new police stations and security camps were set up to prevent any major Maoist attack.
  The cadre strength of the Maoists has consequently reduced.
- Similarly, a police action in Raigarh district eventually forced the Maoists to abandon their plan of expansion. The Ministry of Home Affairs, too, subsequently removed Raigarh from its Security Related Expenditure scheme.
- When the Maoists decided to create a new zone in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, the target districts were immediately put on alert, so as not to allow them to gain ground. Security forces were redeployed to ensure better territorial command.

- As the Chhattisgarh police have experience in tackling Maoists in Bastar, they are now coordinating with the bordering States to strengthen intelligence and ground presence. Such coordinated proactive policing will dampen the Maoists' plans.

Steps taken: Finding a permanent solution

The Maoist problem is not merely a law and order issue. A permanent solution lies in eliminating the root cause of the problem that led to the alienation of tribals in this area.

- The focus now is to build roads and install communication towers to increase administrative and political access of the tribals, and improve the reach of government schemes.
- The government has enhanced the support price of minor forest produce like imli(tamarind).
- More bank branches have been opened to ensure financial inclusion.
- All India Radio stations in the three southern districts of Bastar will now broadcast regional programmes to increase entertainment options.
- And a new rail service in Bastar is set to throw open a new market for wooden artefacts and bell metal.
- Despite the Maoists not wanting their children to study and get government jobs, remarkable work has been done in the field of school education and skill development.
- The government has opened up livelihood centres, known as Livelihood Colleges, in all the districts.

If the youth are constructively engaged by the government, the recruitment of youth by the Maoists will slowly stop.

Path ahead: Winning a psychological war - Role of civil society

Winning a psychological war against the Maoists remains an unfinished task. Though the government's rehabilitation policies have helped the surrendered cadres turn their lives around, security personnel are still accused of being informers and are killed. A permanent solution lies in reversing the alienation of tribals.

To end this, civil society must join hands with the government in realising the villagers' right to development.

Loopholes in implementing government schemes must not be used as a tool to strengthen the hands of the Maoists. Indian democracy is strong enough to absorb even its adversaries if they abjure violence.

Conclusion:

The two-pronged policy of direct action by the security forces combined with development is showing results — the government has already made a dent in most of the affected districts and is determined to check the expansion of Maoists. The paradigm of proactive policing and holistic development should ensure more such significant results in the future.

However, for the success of Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) strategy it is essential that the civil society is roped in.

Connecting the dots:

- The two-pronged policy, of the government, of direct action by the security forces combined with development in Maoist-affected areas is showing results. Discuss.

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

Promoting financial Inclusion: Moving beyond BC model

Background:

Since Independence, several attempts have been made towards financial inclusion of the poor, particularly in rural areas. The initiatives include the cooperative movement, followed by priority sector lending, lead bank scheme, service area approach, creation of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural development, introduction of regional rural banks/ local area banks, microfinance, kisan credit cards, business correspondence and finally Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana.

It is time to introspect as to why these programmes have not been effective in improving economic conditions of the poor people.

Poor success:

The outcome of earlier financial inclusion programmes has been much below expectations.

- According to NSSO reports, the share of institutional credit to farmers declined from a peak of 69.4 per cent in 1991 to 56 per cent in 2012. Farmers' dependence on non-institutional credit has gone up from 30.6 per cent in 1991 to 44 per cent in 2012.
- According to the 70th Round of National Sample Survey, among the institutional agencies, the share of commercial banks' lending to agriculture was the highest at 25.1 per cent, followed by co-operatives at 24.8 per cent in 2012 due to their low cost.
- Self-help groups contributed only 2.2 per cent of total institutional credit.
- Micro finance institutions (MFIs) continue to charge poor borrowers 24-34 per cent, close to the usurious interest rates charged by village money lenders.

Issue:

- All the above initiatives are supply driven — supply of banking services to the poor people at their doorstep.Availability of finance is a means to an end, but not an end in itself. The ultimate objective is to provide a constant source of income to the poor so that they will demand financial services. If banks do not wish to penetrate into remote rural areas, other service providers could surely do so, provided there is a genuine demand for it. Supply-driven financial inclusion does not work.
- The RBI has nudged banks to open a brick and mortar branch in every village with a population of 2,000 or more. However, according to the 2011 Census, 96 per cent of Indian villages have a population of less than 1,000.

The BC model: In order to provide banking services at reasonable costs to the poor people, the business correspondents model was introduced in 2006. Being technology driven, the BC model played a critical role in opening large number of Jan-Dhan accounts during the recent period, but was unable to provide basic banking services to them for several reasons.

Why BC model failed?
- The BC model is similar to the agency model followed by insurance companies and pension funds. Out-sourcing of financial services through agents for a commission has been somewhat successful in case of other financial services, as the agents get a constant flow of income.
  The compensation in the case of the BC model is awfully inadequate compared to the services expected from them.
- Banks' lending activities through BCs are negligible. The activities of BCs are typically limited to opening new deposit accounts for a commission. The opportunity of opening new deposit accounts is quickly exhausted, particularly after the success of Jan-Dhan Account scheme.
- BCs are expected to provide small withdrawal and deposit facilities besides remittance service to all deposit holders. He is all in one — a clerk, cashier, branch manager, financial adviser and agent for rural digitization. BCs either neglect these activities, or are not in a position to do justice to them due to the sheer workload.
- Some BCs do agency functions for mutual funds or sell small savings instruments as they get a fair amount of commission. Hence, it is natural for them to ignore basic banking activities that are less lucrative.
- Handling cash is also risky, particularly where the base branch is far away. BCs have limited overdraft facility that may not be sufficient for daily requirement of the account holders.

Way forward:
- As highlighted in Economic Survey 2015-16, the centre can invest in last-mile financial inclusion via further improving BC networks. Regulations governing the remuneration of BCs

may need to be reviewed to ensure that commission rates are sufficient to encourage BCs to remain active.

- The commission-based BC model is not working well for the banking system, unlike for other financial services. Thus, all ultra-small branches with a BC model with more than 1,000 accounts may be immediately converted into brick and mortar branches.
- Alternatively, for every 1,000 Jan-Dhan accounts in a locality, there should be a physical branch.

  Accounts from multiple banks may be shifted to the bank ready to open a brick and mortar branch to serve 1,000 such account holders.

Conclusion:

The Government should pool all resources under several rural development schemes and provide a scheme-based permanent source of income through gainful employment to the rural people. Although, schemes may vary from state-to-state, it would provide a constant source of income and make the financial inclusion truly demand-driven.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you understand by the term BC model for financial inclusion? The model has failed to promote financial inclusion. Critically analyze.

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

General Studies 2:

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

Tackling pollution: Checking Stubble burning

Background:

The pollution level in Delhi reached unprecedented levels this year. Paddy stubble burning in October and November is a major contributor to Delhi's air pollution. Punjab and Haryana governments have banned it, and a stiff fine is levied — Rs 2,500 for two acres and up to Rs 15,000 for larger areas. Despite this, stubble burning goes on.

Issue:

Bans and fines are unlikely to be effective. To devise a policy with a chance to succeed, one needs to understand the reasons why farmers prefer burning.

- Today, paddy harvesting is done by harvester combines, which leave two thirds of the stalks on the ground. When manually harvested, the crops can be cut at the bottom and the stalks could be sent for other uses such as paper mills, animal bedding, etc. However, manual harvesting has become very expensive. Labourers charge around Rs 4,000 per acre and take three to four days. A harvester combine does it in half an hour and charges Rs 1,200 per acre.
  Farmers burn paddy straw after the crop is harvested. It is the **cheapest and quickest way** to get their fields ready in time for the sowing of next crop.
- Stubble burning has also some other advantages. It kills weeds including those resistant to herbicides.
  It also kills slugs and other pests.

Disadvantages of stubble burning:

- Stubble burning causes smoke and particulate pollution that can move over long distance. In Punjab alone, 15 million tonnes of paddy straw is burnt every year. One tonne of straw when burnt releases 3 kg of particulate matter, 60 kg of carbon monoxide, 1,460 kg of carbon dioxide, 199 kg of ash and 2 kg of sulphur dioxide. Thus 15 million tonnes of paddy straw will generate 45 million tonnes of particulates. This poses a lethal hazard.
- Stubble burning also implies loss of nutrients.
Yet, a farmer's economic compulsions dominate his decision.

Checking stubble burning: To check stubble burning, we need to find a way that provides him economic incentive to cease from it.Punjab and Haryana plant some 10.5 million acres of paddy. If the burning is to be stopped, farmers would want Rs 2,800 per acre, which is the extra cost of employing manual labour. Bearing such cost is not only impossible but also irrational.We need to thus **generate a demand for economical use of straw**, so that it will be gathered and used, eliminating the need for burning.

Stubble can be used to make bio-char or cellulosic ethanol, burn in a power plant or plant the next crop without tillage.

- **Bio-char** is a fine-grained, carbon-rich, porous product remaining after straw has been subjected to pyrolysis at low temperatures in an environment with little or no oxygen. Bio-char with its highly porous structure, improved water retention and increased soil surface area when used with other fertilisers, increases the yield by up to 30 per cent to 50 per cent for some soils and crops.
- Another use of paddy straw will be **as fuel** in a power plant. A 12MW plant of IFCL in Patiala district collects a lakh tonne of straw and generates 5.5 crore kWh of electricity. Around 10 to 12 power plants can cover the whole paddy-rice area in Punjab and Haryana.
- Using stubble to make cellulosic ethanol. HPCL is setting up a plant in Punjab to produce ethanol from paddy straw.

Both power generation and cellulosic ethanol provide options that can be implemented quickly. Also, they provide additional income to farmers for the paddy stubble. While power plant is a proven technology, cellulosic ethanol production is a new one but a very important technology for the country's energy security and emission reduction.

Conclusion:

Thus, a multipronged strategy is called for promoting power plants and ethanol production. A subsidy can be given so as to encourage private entrepreneurs to set up these plants. Only then can we hope to reduce stubble burning substantially and also add to the farmers' income.

Connecting the dots:

- Levying stiff fines and banning stubble burning is an ineffective way to deal with the issue. Analyze. Suggest better ways to check it, if any.
- Stubble burning in adjoining states of Punjab and Haryana has been responsible for pollution in Delhi. How far do you agree with the statement? Suggest ways stubble burning can be checked.

TOPIC

General studies 1:

- *Effects of Globalization on Indian Society; Urbanization and related issues*

General studies 2:

- *Important aspects of governance and e-governance*
- *Issues regarding services relating to Health, Education, Human Resource*

Municipal Reforms

In news:

The Union ministry of housing and urban affairs has prepared a **comprehensive road map for municipal reforms**. The road map consists of three tiers of reforms.

AMRUT- Basic reforms: From 2015 to 2017, some basic reforms were implemented in 500 cities under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation. For example, 104 cities in 14 states collected more than 90% of user charges; many states have established municipal cadres and state finance commissions; cities started offering online citizen services etc. Now, the time has to come to go to the next level of reforms.

Tier I reforms:

The purpose is to accelerate ongoing key financial and service delivery reforms. There are three sets of reforms:

- Cities have to submit financial year audited accounts for the two years preceding the one in which the municipality seeks to claim the performance grant.
- Cities have to show an increase in their revenue over the preceding year, as reflected in the audited accounts.
- Cities have to measure and publish service levels for coverage of water supply, reduction of non-revenue water, 24x7 water supply and scientific processing of solid waste.

Once these conditions are met, cities get the performance grant (Rs18,000 crore in five years) set down by the Fourteenth Finance Commission.

Tier 2 reforms:

It consists of five transformative reforms:

- Formulating and implementing value-capture financing policy.
- Ensuring that all urban local bodies undergo credit rating and cities with investible- grade rating issue municipal bonds.
- Professionalize municipal cadres by creating five of them, filling up posts and allowing lateral entry of professionals.
- Implementing the trust and verify model.
- Enacting and implementing a land-titling law with a focus on using information technology.

The trust and verify model:

It is a paradigm shift from the current process for municipal permissions. While granting building permissions, cities generally inspect first and give approvals later. This is the **verify and trust model**. The process of inspection results in time delays and cost overruns, and opens up opportunities for rent seeking. Inverting this process gives us the trust and verify process in which permission is issued first and inspection taken up later. The assumption is that citizens can be trusted and will furnish correct information. Inspections are only carried out after permission is issued.

Land titling:

In urban areas this is an area of concern. A 2001 McKinsey study has reported that most, over 90% by one estimate, of the land titles in India are 'unclear' and land market distortions and unclear land titles cost India around 1.3% of gross domestic product. In India, ownership rights to property are proved through title deeds. Even though the law provides that transfers of title and interest in property should be registered, this only provides limited assurance. Therefore, there is a need to devise a mechanism by which transfers cannot be set aside. One way is to formulate a land-titling law. The Rajasthan government, for instance, has passed the Urban Land (Certification of Titles) Bill, 2016 to issue certificate of

ownership to state residents living in urban areas. The new reform agenda incentivises all states to enact similar legislation.

Tier 3 reforms:

The focus of tier 3 is rapid and even more transformational reforms along three main avenues: governance, planning and finance. The emphasis is on:

- Deepening decentralization and strengthening urban local bodies through greater devolution of funds, functions and functionaries.
- Own source revenue mobilization for self-reliance.
- Flexibility in urban planning, particularly aligning master plans to changing socio-economic conditions in cities.

Way forward:

- Enhancing downstream accountability mechanisms, like making local ward committees responsible for operation and maintenance of projects, etc.
- States and cities competing against each other and the incentive be given based on competition.
- Cities must have the flexibility to define their reform paths and innovate.

Connecting the dots:

- The ministry of housing and urban affairs has launched a roadmap for comprehensive municipal reforms. Discuss the components of the plan.
- Land titling is a major issue in India, especially in urban areas. Discuss.
- The Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation implemented between 2015-17 were the basic reforms. Indian cities now require a push for next level reforms. Analyze.

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:

- ***Mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment***
- ***Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.***

Aerospace & Defence Manufacturing: Sunrise sectors

Background:

Aerospace and defence manufacturing are the sunrise sectors for today. At upwards of $50 billion, India has one of the largest defence budgets in the world. By 2018, it is expected to be

in the vicinity of $56 billion. In the commercial aviation sector, India remains one of the highest traffic growth markets. It is estimated to become the third-largest aviation market in the world by 2025, and will likely need nearly 1,500 new commercial aircraft by 2030. A drive towards globalization of the aerospace supply chain has been fuelled by the lowering of trade barriers, decreasing communication and transport costs, the emergence of global service firms and shortage of skilled labour in home markets.

Sunrise sectors:
- The sector which has the potential to generate vast amounts of jobs and revenue.
- Policymakers put in place measures such as tax breaks to encourage these sectors.

In the past, information technology (IT) and biotechnology (BT) were the two most prominent holders of the sunrise-sector tag.

Creating a large base of domestic defence manufacturing:

The government is well aware that timely execution of the modernization plan hinges on creating a large base of domestic manufacturing. The government has introduced the long-awaited **strategic partnership model.**
- It will allow partnerships with overseas companies to manufacture everything from submarines to fighter jets in India.
- It also opens the doors for Indian companies to form joint ventures with multinational original-equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for defence production.

This model has the potential to create a high-tech defence manufacturing ecosystem. That, in turn, will help in the emergence of cutting-edge mid-sized ancillary companies, along the lines of German *mittelstand* firms that are relatively small but best-in-class. Indian manufacturers that offer high-quality and innovative solutions at a low cost could become the preferred suppliers for global firms.

Key challenges: Following are key challenges companies face in the aerospace and defence (A&D) sector:
- Access to technology and talent. It has high technological requirements.
- Building scale in a business that is extremely capital-intensive. Costly raw materials along with a prolonged gestation period.
- The enabling infrastructure and policy environment which can be clubbed together as what is known as the ease-of-doing-business basket.
- Skilled labour requirements, and the procurement of parts from multiple manufacturers.
- Manufacturers in Europe and North America have multiple decades of head start over the Indian aerospace industry. India cannot close that gap overnight.

Way forward:

Strong collaboration between the government, which would be the biggest customer, and the private sector, can help close the gap faster.

Creating infrastructure:

Infrastructure plays a critical role in building an A&D manufacturing base. It requires all stakeholders to think in terms of creating the right ecosystem. The automobile manufacturing sector benefited from having ancillary hubs around large car plants located in Gurugram, Chennai and Pune.

- The government would do well to encourage the creation of A&D hubs too.
- Creating clusters helps micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that supply components and sub-assemblies to large manufacturers. The long gestation period and capital intensity often create entry barriers for SMEs in this sector. Vibrant clusters would make it easy for companies to have access to talent and create synergies on logistics.

Examples:

Telangana is home to the country's first public aerospace and precision engineering special economic zone (SEZ). Karnataka too is setting up similar facilities.

- What is required in an ideal ecosystem is the setting up of facilities which cater to multiple stages of the supply chain, all in one location. Such manufacturing hubs should ideally allow companies to carry out fabrication, machining, forging, warehousing and a whole lot more in one place. The target is to create **an integrated aerospace ecosystem** which enables customers to source all their requirements from one place to hasten the time-to-market.

Fulfilling skilled labor requirements: Since the industry needs a skilled talent pool for this highly specialized industry, the creation of educational institutions and universities by the government that are tailor-made for the A&D sector, will go a long way in making India a preferred manufacturing destination.

Conclusion:

While there has been a sea change in the government's attitude towards private companies in the A&D sector, the defence public sector undertakings, which hitherto held a monopoly, view the private sector as competition. If seen as partners and collaborators instead, the benefits for the nation could be transformative.

<u>Connecting the dots:</u>

- What do you mean by the term 'sunrise sectors'? Aerospace and defence manufacturing are the sunrise sectors for today. Discuss.
- Aerospace and defence manufacturing sector has huge scope for growth both in terms of revenues and providing job opportunities. In this light it is important that the government create a right policy environment for them. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL

Rohingya Crisis

Background:

The reconciliation and rehabilitation of more than 836,000 Rohingya (including 623,000 since August, according to the UN's International Organisation for Migration) who have fled gruesome violence in Myanmar has become a global issue.

In every way, the Rohingya crisis is mammoth, with around a million men, women and children in Bangladesh and Myanmar living perilously.

Issue:

India has been soft-footed and silent in comparison to other countries like China, U.S., Canada and Singapore.

China's involvement:

- In a rare shift of position from not involving itself in the internal politics of, China decided to play a mediatory role in the issue. The Chinese foreign minister went to Dhaka to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and then to Myanmar.
- A three-phase solution: Bangladesh and Myanmar announced an agreement to begin the repatriation of Rohingya refugees back to Rakhine province after China's interference in the issue.

Biggest nation, smallest voice:

- No Indian leader has visited Myanmar in relation to Rohingya issue.
- As the subcontinent's biggest nation, neighbour to both Bangladesh and Myanmar, as well as the country most likely to be affected if the numbers of Rohingya refugees continue to grow, India in fact should be showing the most initiative in this crisis.
- Even as hundreds of thousands were fleeing violence at home, Mr. Modi refused to refer to the Rohingya in his press statements in Naypyidaw in early September.

- Bali declaration- In Bali, India refused to endorse a 50-nation parliamentarian conference's declaration because it referenced the Rohingya. Every other South Asian country, including Buddhist-majority Bhutan and Sri Lanka, endorsed the Bali declaration.
- In contrast to India's own record: India has a tradition of rushing humanitarian aid and medical assistance, doctors and volunteers to other nations — for example, after the 2004 tsunami, the 2008 Cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar, and the 2015 Nepal earthquake. India's half-hearted effort in Rohingya issue is thus in stark contrast.

Operation Insaniyat (Humanity):

- Launched in September, the government began to dispatch humanitarian aid under this operation.
- Several countries including the U.S., Turkey, Azerbaijan, Malaysia and others were already doing so.

Position at the UN:

- India's voice at UN has been consistently muted, ceding space to other countries to take the lead on the issue.
- At the UNGA's Third Committee vote, India abstained on a resolution calling for an end to military action, one of 26 abstentions on the proposal to send a UN fact-finding mission to Myanmar — 135 countries voted in favour of the resolution. While India's vote is consistent with its position on interventionist resolutions, it doesn't mark itself out for principled leadership of any kind.

Being part of the solution to the crisis:

All of India's actions since the outbreak of this round of violence in Myanmar have negated its position as a regional, subcontinental and Asian leader. Regaining that stature will require a more proactive stance in being part of the solution to the crisis.

- The impression that the government's decision to push out nearly 40,000 Rohingya living in India since 2012 is guided by its domestic political compulsions is not conducive to India's international ambitions.
- India should put its own concerns about repatriation on hold until it is able to work with both Bangladesh and Myanmar on the issue, preferably in a trilateral format.

As India has earlier worked on regional issues as a part of BIMSTEC, this would be easier for India.

Time to have a refugee policy:

- The government must also iron out internal contradictions on India's refugee policy.

- Even though it is not a signatory to any UN refugee convention, India has a proud tradition of giving a home to neighbours in distress: from Tibetans in 1960s to East Pakistanis in the 1970s, from Sri Lankans in the 1980s to the Afghans in the 1990s.
- Recently, government even changed its long-term visa rules to help minorities fleeing violence from neighbouring Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- India also has a unique position as a country that is home to every religion practised in the region and must play to this strength.

Conclusion:

Thus, India, which has high stakes in global and regional governance, must ensure its voice is heard on the Rohingya crisis. Not taking a stand while one of the biggest human tragedies is unfolding across two of India's borders does not suits to a nation with global leadership aspirations. India's shyness on the Rohingya crisis undermines its democracy and global standing.

Connecting the dots:

- India, which has high stakes in global and regional governance, must ensure its voice is heard on the Rohingya crisis. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:
- *India and the world; India – Japan 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*

Japan's Strategic Vision for Asia and its Partnership with India

Introduction:

Japan's geopolitical context has been undergoing dramatic changes in recent years.

Some major factors which have brought those changes:

- First and foremost factor is certainly the remarkable rise of China, that is, China's rapidly growing political influence and economic power.

- Second is pending issues with North Korea. North Korea has posed threats to Japan with its nuclear program and by launching ballistic missiles into waters in the neighbourhood of the Japanese archipelago.

- Third is the unpredictable nature or mood of Trump-led U.S. regime and Japan no longer believes that a wholescale reliance on the U.S. for a defence umbrella is sufficient to secure its best interests.

- Fourth, the vacuum created by the U.S.'s withdrawal from the leadership in Asia.

All these factors led Tokyo to cast off its diplomatic slumber and rethink its role in Asia.

Increasing role of Japan in Asia:

- Japan has realised that remilitarising alone will not provide the country with an effective solution to its diplomatic dilemmas.

- It believes that there is a need to prevent the region from (succumbing to a Pax Sinica) or surrendering to Chinese hegemony.

Southeast Asian countries are the ones to which Japan provided massive official development assistance after the Second World War, contributing to the build-up of their important infrastructure and paving the way to their economic development and prosperity.

However, while Japan still continues to enjoy friendly and cooperative relations with them, it is natural that they have to pay more and more attention to Chinese claims and positions these days, particularly on issues of contention between Japan and China, and tend to take a neutral position on the sensitive issues.

- Japan realizes that it has to use its strengths, its capital, its technological know-how and its democratic credentials to win friends and influence countries across the region and beyond. It needs to beat infrastructure sugar daddy China at its own game.

- It wants to lead rule-making on trade in the Asia Pacific, rather than let China set the agenda with alternatives to TPP such as the Beijing-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Recent actions taken by Japan:

1. Japan is attempting to stake leadership on the regional platform with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). With the U.S.'s departure from trade negotiations, Japan has become the principal driving force keeping the deal alive.

2. At November's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Vietnam, Japan got the 11 countries still involved to agree on the "core elements" of a deal.

3. Japan is stepping up aid and investment in Southeast Asia. A train line near Manila, a seaport in Cambodia, and assistance in the reconstruction of Marawi City in the Philippines.

4. As the top source of development aid to Vietnam, it has helped construct a new airport terminal in Hanoi as well as the first subway line in Ho Chi Minh City.

5. Japan government recently committed 1 trillion yen ($8.7 billion) to the Philippines over the next five years, with a continued focus on infrastructure development.

6. Japanese investment in major Southeast Asian countries is estimated to have averaged $20 billion per year, from 2011 to 2016, more than double the average annual flows between 2006 and 2010.

Recent India and Japan relations

1. To compete and match China's $900 billion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure, Japan and India have announced an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, aimed at creating sea corridors linking the countries of the Indo-Pacific to Africa.

2. Japan is cooperating with India in third country infrastructure projects such as Iran's Chabahar Port, Sri Lanka's Trincomalee port, and the possible joint development of the Dawei port along the Thai-Myanmar border.

3. Japan has bagged the $17 billion contract to build India's first high speed railway line, linking Mumbai and Ahmedabad.

4. Tokyo is also investing in development projects in the Northeast and the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

5. Japan's Diet gave the go ahead to a Japan-India civil nuclear energy deal earlier this year.

6. The possibility of purchasing Japanese submarines and search-and-rescue planes to help the Indian Navy is being discussed.

Creating 'Quad'

- A free and open Indo-Pacific, a phrasing that places India as a major actor in the Pacific, is an idea being proselytised by Japan in conjunction with the U.S.

- This is a response to concerns over the expansion of the Chinese navy and Beijing's territorial claims in the South China Sea, waters through which a huge majority of Japanese energy supplies transit.

- It is against this background that Japan's championing of the Quadrilateral dialogue with the U.S., India and Australia aimed at creating a community of democratically oriented interests in the region must be understood.

Connecting the dots:
- Strengthening ties between India and Japan should seen in the context of emerging geopolitical trends viz, rise of China and the shift of the geopolitical centre of gravity from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific region. Analyze.

- It is imperative that India and Japan look beyond their lofty geopolitical aims, at the more basic aspects of bilateral engagement. 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*

Diversion of R. Brahmaputra by China

In news: China is planning to divert the waters of the Yarlung Tsangpo (the upper stream of India's Brahmaputra) to its water-starved Xinjiang province.Xinjiang, China's largest administrative division, comprises vast swathes of uninhabitable deserts and dry grasslands.A 1000 km-long tunnel is being tested in order to transfer water.

South-North Water Transfer project: The diversion has been a long-standing part of the grand South-North Water Transfer project conceptualised as early as in the 1950s by Mao Zedong.

Understanding the flow of the river:
The Brahmaputra is identified as the flow downstream of the meeting of three tributaries, namely Luhit, Dibang and Dihang, near Sadiya. Out of the total length of the Brahmaputra of 2,880 km, 1,625 km is in Tibet flowing as Yarlung Tsangpo, 918 km is in India known as Siang, Dihang and Brahmaputra and the rest 337 km in Bangladesh has the name Jamuna till it merges into Padma near Goalando.As a trans-Himalayan tributary, Yarlung is substantially fed by snow and glacial melts, in addition to rainfall. Snow and glacial melt, the main source of run-off in the Tibetan region, contributes negligibly to the total flow.

Understanding the geography of the region: The Tibetan Plateau, often referred to as "the roof of the world", stops the monsoon from the Indian Ocean reaching Xinjiang, leaving the Gobi Desert in the north and the Taklimakan desert in the south unsuitable for human settlement. The Xinjiang province of China comprises of this desert area.

Adverse impacts:

- For India, national security implications follow as the Yarlung Tsangpo also flows into a disputed border region with China.
- Another concern relates to the impact of the projects on the sediment flows. Water diversion can affect sediment flow.
- The region is also earthquake-prone and it could lead to a huge natural disaster.
- Any project that diverts water from upstream Brahmaputra is likely to annoy both New Delhi and Dhaka, as the river is a major water resource for both northeastern India and Bangladesh.

Key points:

There are four critical points that emerge from the history of interactions over water between China and India-

- The Brahmaputra agreement between China and India is a suboptimal arrangement within broader bilateral relations. As per the current agreement, China has thus far agreed to share hydrological data on the Yarlung Tsangpo/Brahmaputra (YTB) during the monsoon seasons. The agreement, at best, is a piecemeal discount offered by China. Despite two decades of negotiation, further cooperation on water, however, is in a state of a deadlock.

- Discussions over the YTB have often been overshadowed by the border dispute. Sino-Indian history is replete with examples wherein despite tense bilateral relations, cooperation over transboundary rivers have occurred. For instance, despite border incursion by the Chinese army in the Depsang Valley in Ladakh in 2013, China and India went ahead to sign the extension of the 2002 Memorandum of Understanding on data sharing on the Brahmaputra river.However, there has been no progress in discussing more important issues of who has the right to how much water and the impact of dams and diversions on the upper reaches of the river.
- China's approach to transboundary water sharing is shifting towards multilateral arrangements. In 2015, China signed the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) framework along with five other countries through which the Mekong flows. In South Asia, China has been insistent in establishing greater ties with Bangladesh on flood forecasting, water technologies, and water management. India, on the other hand, prefers bilateral relations, as it has with Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. China charges approximately $125,000 for the data it provides to India; at the same time, it sends similar data to Bangladesh for free. By way of improving relationship with Bangladesh, China could well be aiming to encircle India to reach a deal on the sharing of YTB that favours China's objective of economic expansionism.
- The Indian approach to the YTB issue is influenced by developmental imperatives and domestic politics. The Brahmaputra is an important resource for India's own water diversion plans – the national river interlinking project – and is considered a powerhouse to meet India's energy demands in the future. India tends to play the lower riparian card to gain sympathy from its domestic political constituencies, especially of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

What India needs to do?India will need to be more adept in responding to Brahmaputra river-related issues.

- India needs to clearly envision the desired end goal and strategic outcomes for dealing with impending water conflicts.
- India needs to de-emphasise China's role for the time being and re-strengthen its relationship with Bangladesh. It needs to push the impending Teesta river agreement and restore its image as a responsible upper riparian.
- India needs to mirror its strength and firmness in negotiations with China on water rights, as it did in the case of the Doklam stand-off and in opposing the Belt and Road Initiative, rather than projecting itself as a victim.

Conclusion:

There are currently no water treaties between India, China, and Bangladesh. India will certainly have to take a strong stand as far as this project goes, as it can be disastrous for India and Bangladesh.

Connecting the dots:

- China is planning to divert the rivers of R. Brahmaputra by building 1000-km tunnel. Discuss the implications of such a diversion. Also suggest ways India needs to tackle the issue.

TOPIC
General Studies 2:

- ***India and its neighbourhood- relations.***
- ***Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests***
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Focusing on Indo-Pacific

Background:
Indo-Pacific as an idea gained attention during 2017. Its time India must think on another expansive geopolitical construct — Eurasia.

The concept of Indo-Pacific and Eurasia:

- Like the Indo-Pacific, the concept of Eurasia is quite familiar to geographers.
- Marine bio-geographers use the Indo-Pacific to describe the large stretch of tropical waters from the east coast of Africa to the Western Pacific that has many common features.
- For geologists, Eurasia refers to a tectonic plate that lies under much of what we know as Europe and Asia.
- It is in the domain of politics that the terms Indo-Pacific and Eurasia holds significance.
- There was a resistance in Delhi to the idea of the Indo-Pacific. For many, the Indo-Pacific was a suspicious American invention.
- Like India, America was not quite sure. It was President Donald Trump who ended American ambivalence by consistently using the term "Indo-Pacific" during Asian tour last month.

Recent developments:
The Indian political and policy establishment must adapt to the slow but certain integration of India into a single geopolitical theatre.

- The Chabahar port on the south-eastern coast of Iran, formally launched on Sunday by President Hassan Rouhani, opens up not just an alternative route to Afghanistan but also facilitates India's overland connectivity with Central Eurasia.

- At the annual gathering of the heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Sochi, Russia-
- Delhi, along with Islamabad, has been accepted earlier this year as a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The membership of the SCO covers the heart of Eurasia.
- The annual summit of an organisation called C-CEEC was held at Budapest, Hungary. It promotes cooperation between China and 16 Central and East European Countries. It is more popularly known as "sixteen plus one". That India is hardly interested in this new forum underlines the problem it has in dealing with a changing Eurasia.

Change in discourse:
- The rise of China is connecting up the Pacific and Indian Oceans, Beijing is breaking down the idea that Europe and Asia are two different continents.
- By exporting large amounts of capital for infrastructure development, drawing its economies east ward, and creating new political groupings, China has begun to undermine the Western hubris and Russian self-regard in Central Europe.
- It also widens the strategic options for Central European states.

Challenges for India:
- Delhi's world-view, traditionally defined in terms of an irreconcilable tension between "East and West", "North and South" or "Europe and Asia" is becoming unsustainable as China's massive Silk Road Initiative begins to integrate Europe with Asia. Chinese expansion and American retrenchment is reshaping the political and economic geography of Eurasia.
- The government has put India back in play in the maritime world by accepting the Indo-Pacific idea. But Delhi is yet to come to grips with continental Eurasia. Delhi has been reluctant to walk though the open door in Europe. Focused as it is on bilateral relations with France, Germany and Russia, Delhi has neglected the European Union and ignored Central Europe.

Conclusion:
There is thus an imbalance between how India deals with the concept of Indo-Pacific on one hand and the concept of Eurasia on the other. Correcting the imbalance is the first step towards a more purposeful Indian engagement with Eurasia.

Connecting the dots:
- While Delhi has focused on bilateral relations with France, Germany and Russia, it has neglected the European Union and ignored Central Europe. Critically analyze.

Getting realistic about UNSC

Introduction:

Primarily at our initiative, the question of Security Council reform, its expansion, has been under consideration since 1970s. There is near unanimous support for increasing the number of non-permanent seats. There are issues unresolved and challenges when it comes to getting a permanent seat for India at UNSC.

Bodies of UN and their importance:

The two most prestigious organs of the United Nations are the Security Council and the International Court of Justice.

Security Council:

The Security Council has 15-member states.

Election to the UNSC is conducted only in the General Assembly and requires two-thirds majority to get elected.

The UNSC is by far more important from the national interest point of view. It deals with questions of peace and security as well as terrorism and has developed a tendency to widen its ambit into other fields, including human rights and eventually environment. In addition to the Kashmir issue, which Pakistan forever tries to raise, there are other matters in which India would be interested such as the list of terrorists — Hafeez Saeed for example.

ICJ:

The ICJ has 15 judges.

Election to the ICJ is held concurrently in the UNGA and UNSC and requires absolute majority of the total membership in each organ. Veto does not apply for election to the ICJ.

The ICJ is required to represent the principal civilisations and legal systems of the world. The judges sitting on ICJ are expected to act impartially, not as representatives of the countries of

their origin. That is why they are nominated, not by their governments but by their national groups in the Permanent Court of Arbitration based in The Hague.

To have an Indian judge at the ICJ, when we have an active case on its agenda regarding our national in illegal custody of Pakistan might be of some advantage.

Other bodies:

There are other bodies in the UN that are not as well known but are important enough to be represented on. Like:

- The ACABQ (Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) and the Committee on Contributions. The former consists of 16 members elected by the UNGA on the recommendation of the Fifth Committee of the UNGA dealing with the budget of the UN.
- The Committee on Contributions recommends the scale of assessments to the budget and the share of each member. This is a very important function, since the share decided by the UNGA applies to all the specialised agencies, etc.
- There is also the Human Rights Council; we have had almost continuous representation on it. The U.S. lost the election to it a few years ago; there is widespread resentment against the P-5's presumption to a permanent seat on all bodies.

Unresolved issues:

The controversial question is about the increase in the category of permanent seats. The rationale for expansion has been accepted in-principle by nearly all, but the difficulty arises when the actual numbers and their rights are discussed.

India, along with Brazil, Germany and Japan, has proposed an increase of six additional permanent seats, the other two being for Africa.

- The African group is demanding two permanent seats, recognised as reasonable by every member, but there are at least three and perhaps more claimants for the two seats.
- Then there is the question of the rights of the additional members. The G-4's initial position was for the same rights as the present permanent members, essentially the veto right. Over the years, they have become more realistic and would be willing to forego the veto right. The firm position of the Africans is that the new members must have the same rights as the existing ones. This is a non-starter.

Getting realistic about UNSC:

- The general membership of the UN wants to eliminate the existing veto; they will never agree to new veto-wielding powers. Variants of the veto provision have been suggested,

such as the requirement of double veto, i.e. at least two permanent members must exercise veto for it to be valid. The P-5 are not willing to dilute their self-acquired right.

- Many member-states have been pledging support for our aspiration for permanent membership.
- Several P-5 countries have also announced support. The principal P-5 member opposing us is China.
- The P-5 will never agree to give up their veto right, nor will they agree to accord this right to any other country. (France supports veto for additional permanent members.)
- It has to be underscored that there is no way that India alone, by itself, can be elected as permanent member.
- It will have to be a package deal in which the demands of all the geographical groups, including the Latin America and Caribbean group which, like Africa, does not have a single permanent member, will have to be accommodated.
- Even if the America supports us, they will simply not lobby for India alone. They will try to get Japan also in. China will not support Japan's candidature. The P-5 will play the game among themselves but will stand by one another, as was evident recently at the time of election to the ICJ.

Conclusion:

We should be realistic. If a permanent seat is not available, there are other proposals on the table.

One proposal is for the creation of 'semi-permanent' seats, according to which members would be elected for six-eight years and would be eligible for immediate reelection. Given India's growing prestige and respect, it should not be difficult for us to successfully bid for one of these seats; it might be a better alternative than to unrealistically hope for a permanent seat.

Connecting the dots:

- India has been pursuing the UNSC reforms since 1970s. Off late New Delhi is eying a permanent seat at the UNSC. Though we have supporters to our claim, there are various challenges associated. In this light, India should get more realistic and try other options. 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*

U.S.'s recognition of Jerusalem

Background:

U.S. President Donald Trump has recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The decision endlessly given international public opinion and the political and moral sensitivity of the issue.

Israel: America's greatest ally in West Asia

- The U.S. has largely favoured Israel throughout the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and East Jerusalem.

- It has offered protection to Israel in the UN Security Council, come to its aid in times of crises, and provided it with advanced weapons.

- The U.S. has even looked away when Israel was amassing nuclear weapons.

In return, Israel has become America's greatest ally in West Asia.

Fallouts:

- Jerusalem is at the very heart of an Israeli-Palestinian solution. By endorsing Israel's claims over the city, the American President has made an already sensitive issue more sensitive.
- The move will only strengthen the Israeli Right, which is dead opposed to ceding any inch of Jerusalem to a future Palestinian state.
- Israel has been defying international norms and UNSC resolutions, but America publicly endorsing Israel's illegal claims is unprecedented.
- A President who promised the "ultimate deal" to resolve the conflict has effectively dealt a body blow to the peace process.

The Conflict:

- Jerusalem has never been recognised as Israel's capital by the international community.
- In the original UN General Assembly plan to partition Palestine and create independent Jewish and Arab states, Jerusalem was deemed an international city.
- The Zionists didn't wait for the plan to be implemented by the UN.
- In 1948, they declared the state of Israel and in the ensuing Arab-Israeli war, they captured 23% more territories than even what the UN had proposed, including the western half of Jerusalem.
- Israel seized East Jerusalem in 1967 from Jordan, and later annexed it. Since then, Israel has been encouraging illegal settlements in the eastern parts of the city, with Palestinians being forced to live in their historical neighbourhoods.

- In 1980, the Israeli Parliament passed a basic law, declaring Jerusalem "complete and united" as its capital. This move invoked sharp reaction from world powers, including the U.S.
- The UN Security Council (UNSC) declared the draft law "null and void" and urged member countries to withdraw their diplomatic missions from the Holy City.

Alternative:

- The U.S. should have held talks with both sides and extracted compromises, taking the peace process a step forward.
- Mr. Trump would also have said which part of Jerusalem he was recognising as Israel's seat of power and endorsed the Palestinians' claim over East Jerusalem, including the Old City.
- US should have put pressure on Israel to come forward and engage the Palestinians in talks.

Improved chances of conciliation:

- Hamas, the Islamist movement that controls the Gaza Strip, recently came up with a new political charter that signals a readiness to deal with Israel and accept the 1967 border for a future Palestinian state.
- Hamas and the Fatah (party that rules parts of the West Bank), also reached a reconciliation agreement recently.

This could have been used as an opening to break the logjam in the peace process.

Conclusion:

Israel's history suggests that it will not agree to any compromise unless it is forced to do so. Over the years, it has continued its illegal settlements in the occupied territories despite repeated warnings from the international community. The only country that can put effective pressure on Israel is the U.S. The country should thus play a responsible role in the region.

Connecting the dots:

- U.S. President Donald Trump has recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital has made Israeli-Palestinian issue more sensitive. Analyze.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:
- *India and its neighbourhood- relations.*
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The Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral grouping

Background:

The Russia-India-China trilateral held its 15th meeting in New Delhi recently. This was a month after India was part of the 'Quad' discussion on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Manila involving Japan, Australia and the U.S. The trilateral meet is New Delhi's attempt to overcome challenges in ties with Moscow and Beijing

Scope of talks:

The broader discussions took place in the backdrop of-

* The political scenario in West Asia and North Africa.
* Numerous challenges in putting the world economy back on the growth track.
* Concerns relating to terrorism, transnational organised crime, illicit drug trafficking, food security, and climate change.

Background:

* The proposal for a Moscow-Beijing-Delhi 'strategic triangle' had originally come from the then Russian Prime Minister in 1998. He argued that such an arrangement would represent a force for greater regional and international stability.
* This idea of a 'strategic triangle' took a tangible form when former Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, and India met on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2002.

Concern- Growing divergence between Russia and China on one side and India on the other:

Russia and China's continuous attempts to frame global and regional politics through a similar lens, and the growing divergences between India and them.

* Russia wants India to join China's Belt and Road Initiative, while for India membership to the initiative would hurt its sovereignty.
* Targeting India's participation in the 'Quad', Russia has underlined that a sustainable security architecture cannot be achieved in the Asia-Pacific region with "closed bloc arrangements."
* China has oppose Quad grouping by arguing that China opposed "hegemony and power politics and disagree with the sphere of influence and promote the democratisation of international relations.
* China continued to take an aggressive posture on Doklam and its aftermath.
* The joint declaration of the recent trilateral meeting said: "Those committing, organising, inciting or supporting terrorist acts" must be held accountable and brought to justice under international law, including the principle of "extradite or prosecute." It stopped short of

naming Pakistan-based terror groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, something that India would have liked in line with the most recent BRICS declaration.

Different expectations:
The three nations had very different expectations from this trilateral.

- **Russia-**
  Russia's role is key as its loss of power and influence on the world scene was a major cause of concern for its leadership. There was a growing and pervasive feeling in Russia that it surrendered its once-powerful position on the world stage for a position of little international influence and respect. It is against this backdrop that Russia tried to establish itself as the hub of two bilateral security partnerships that could be used to **counteract U.S. power** and influence in areas of mutual concern.

- **China-**
  Since the end of the Cold War, China has emerged as a rising power that saw the U.S. as the greatest obstacle, if it was to achieve a pre-eminent position in the global political hierarchy.
  As a consequence, China recognised the importance of cooperating with Russia to **check U.S. expansionism** in the world, even if only for the short term.

- **India-**
  India saw in the trilateral a mechanism to **bring greater balance in the global order** as it believed that a unipolar U.S.-dominated world was not in the best interests of weaker states like itself, even as strategic convergence deepened between Washington and Delhi.

Moreover, all three countries realised the enormous potential in the economic, political, military and cultural realms if bilateral relationships among them were adequately strengthened.

As a consequence, the trilateral did not lead to consequences of any great importance. It merely resulted in declarations which were often critical of the West, and of the U.S. in particular.

Challenge- Changed geo-political scenario: The recent period has seen significant shifts in Indo-U.S. ties as bilateral relations expanded while Russian and Chinese links with the U.S. have witnessed a downward shift. An arrangement that had started with an attempt to manage American unipolarity is now being affected fundamentally by Chinese resurgence. Both Russia and India are having to deal with the externalities being generated by China's rise. While Russia is getting closer to China, India is trying to leverage its partnership with other like-minded states in the wider Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion:
The Russia-India-China partnership comes with its own set of challenges. New Delhi's continued

engagement with the duo suggests that India is today confident of setting its own agenda in various platforms. Just as China engages with the U.S. on the one hand and with Russia on the other, a rising India is quite capable of managing its ties with Washington, Beijing and Moscow simultaneously. It will not always be easy, but diplomacy will have to tread a complex path. As a multipolar world order takes shape, India will have to engage with multiple partners so as to limit bilateral divergences.

Connecting the dots:

- As a multipolar world order takes shape, India will have to engage with multiple partners so as to limit bilateral divergences. Analyze.
- The Russia-India-China trilateral grouping has not lead to consequences of any great importance because of the growing divergence and different expectations of the three nations.

TOPIC
General studies 2:
- *India and its neighborhood- relations*
- *Bilateral, regional , global groupings and agreement involving India and affecting its interest*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.*
- *Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.*

Reviving SAARC is important

Background:
The 32-year-old SAARC seems to turn into a moribund(decayed) group as India is preoccupied with the exciting prospect of its role in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The South Asian agenda has been reduced, at least in public perception, to countering Pakistan and its terror proxies.

A moribund SAARC is not in our interest:
- Sub-regional and other arrangements such as BIMSTEC, though valuable, are no substitute as these does not include our troublesome western periphery.
- A strong regional group is essential to prevent meddling by external powers and realise our legitimate aspirations in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Obstacles to the emergence of a cohesive South Asia:
- Pakistan is the largest obstacle, but not the only one.

- Inability to reach on agreements. An example is our inability so far to push through a sub-regional Motor Vehicle Agreement with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh after Pakistan blocked a similar arrangement at the SAARC.

Way forward:

We cannot dictate the actions of our neighbours. But we need to pay more attention to certain aspects.

- Our ability to manage our region and stature in the world depend to a considerable degree upon economic success.The continent-sized Indian economy, growing at around 6 per cent, holds a tremendous attraction for our neighbours. In this reference we need to continue strengtheing our economy.
- Realising its special responsibility in driving the locomotive of South Asian growth, India should continue to institutionalise positive asymmetry in favour of the small neighbours and allow all to benefit from her economy and market.
- All our neighbours have certain vested interests opposed to India and it becomes necessary once in a while to send a coercive message to them. This should, however, not alienate the constituencies that are well-disposed towards us. A jingoistic response, as in case of the Pakistan security establishment and its proxies ends up consolidating opinion in their favour. The wisdom of restricting transit for Nepal to punish the short-sighted actions of its governments is also questionable. The resulting hardship can turn the entire population against us.
- Relations with our South Asian neighbours are intertwined with the interests of our states and certain political constituencies. For example, the politics in Tamil Nadu over the Sri Lankan Tamils issue and our relationship with Pakistan has become a subject of electoral politics in recent years. In a democracy, such politics is unavoidable, and if not considered could have unintended consequences.
- The cost and time overruns that mar most of our projects at home due to cumbersome administrative and financial procedures also afflicts our projects in neighbouring countries. We need to focus on improving our project delivery.
- The pull of our soft power is the strongest in South Asia because India remains the repository of nearly all linguistic, religious and cultural traditions of this region. India is the epitome of the South Asian diversity, which we have managed well in our vibrant democracy.
  Thus, the huge soft power of India needs to be preserved on continuous basis.

Conclusion:

We cannot ignore or abandon the task of building a largely cohesive and stable periphery. Groupings like BIMSTEC, Indo-Pacific may seemingly be more important but the success of such groupings can be reaped only when we have a stable neighborhood. And for this stability SAARC is quintessential

Connecting the dots:

- A decaying SAARC is not in India's interest. Discuss. Also highlight the ways India can make our neighbors feel comfortable about a regional grouping.

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.*

Focusing on Indian Ocean Region

Background:

In its National Security Strategy (NSS), the U.S. has called China a "challenger" and "rival" while welcoming India's emergence as a "leading global power and stronger strategic and defence partner", and declared that it seeks to increase 'Quadrilateral' cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India. The NSS also states that the U.S. would support India's growing relationships throughout the region. While the broader emphasis on improving the partnership is welcome, policy-makers in New Delhi should be cautious on two counts:

- One, India should be wary of any attempts at being made to compete as a front in the U.S.'s efforts to check China's rise.
- Two, while the notion of the Indo-Pacific sounds attractive, India must not forget that its primary area of concern is the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). **Securing its position in IOR is vital before venturing elsewhere**.

What needs to be done?

- **India remains a balancing power:**India has always been wooed by both sides and has been a balancing power on the world stages. As its stature in global politics increases, it is in the nation's as well as global interest that India remains a balancing power.
- **Checking rapid expansion of China in IOR:**At the same time, India should hedge against the rapid expansion of Chinese presence in the IOR.
- For India, geographically the area of concern, and so the area of focus, should remain the IOR.
  While reiterating its commitment to upholding the established laws of the global commons, New Delhi should not go adrift in the larger Indo-Pacific. As more powers make inroads into

this strategically crucial space, India must consolidate its position and not expect others to do its job, for it would only mean ceding space in the long run.

Indian Ocean Region(IOR): The IOR stretches from the Gulf of Aden to the Strait of Malacca.
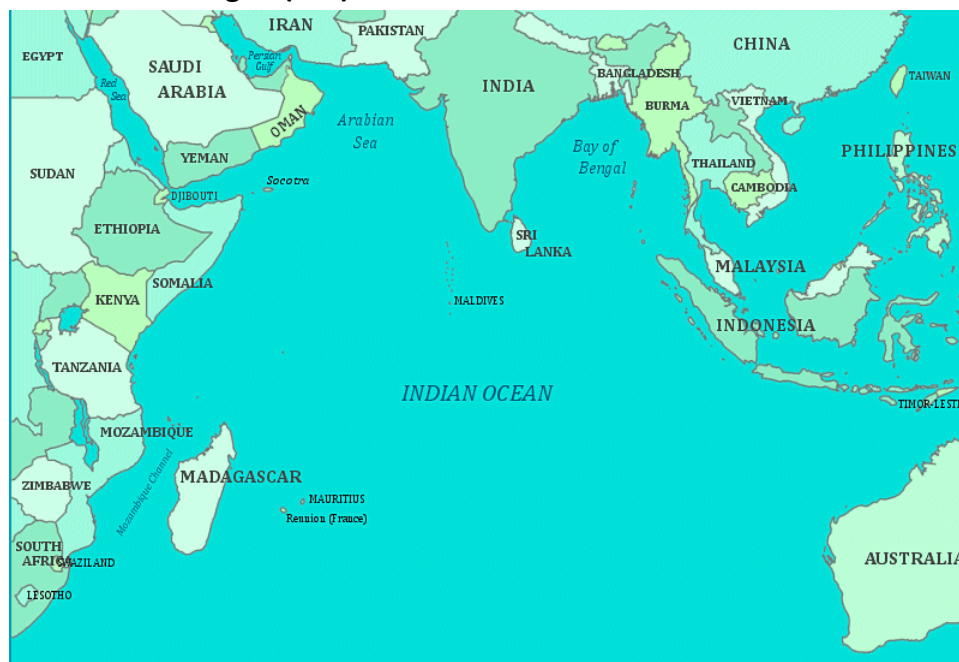
Pic credit: https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-V7nKpjFbI8k/V0BSsV7FvcI/AAAAAAAAADA/jsvB7GwlyP0-p6g7UqmPL9_raxRmYxsnACLcB/s1600/indian-ocean-map.gif

Consolidating India's position in IOR:

There are two ways of doing this —

- Beefing up Indian capacity to secure interests The tags of net security provider and leading global power would mean nothing if New Delhi cannot undertake capacity building in its own backyard, be it South Asia or the IOR. While the offer of help from various countries to help expand India's network in the region looks tempting, it actually reflects India's failure to establish its primacy in the region. Ideally, it should have been the other way round: India guiding outside powers in its backyard.
- Expanding partnerships to fill voids.
- It is imperative for policy-makers in New Delhi to conduct a reality check on relations with our neighbours. Groupings like Quad cannot be at the expense of the neighbours. While being part of various groupings is important, it is imperative that they are in line with our interests.

Recent initiatives:

- Last month, India and Singapore concluded an overarching bilateral agreement for naval cooperation. Besides being only India's second bilateral logistics arrangement, it gives it access to the Changi naval base at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca.
- With Singapore's assistance, India is also working out modalities for joint multilateral exercises with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- India is also negotiating similar logistics agreements with several other countries.
- The Goa Maritime Conclave hosted by the Indian navy last month where Navy Chiefs and maritime heads of 10 Indian Ocean littoral states brainstormed on ways to improve cooperation in the region. It is an India-led initiative where the navy has offered to share information of maritime movement in real-time.

These developments show the way forward for India to engage with like-minded countries in the region without getting entangled in groupings which are seen as being targeted or military in nature (In reference to Quad grouping).

Conclusion:

Thus, India needs to build its primacy in the IOR before venturing into adjacent waters while also making sure that its interests are taken heed of while getting into various groupings and not end up doing what other countries like U.S. wants.

Connecting the dots:

- India needs to build its primacy in the Indian Ocean region(IOR) before venturing into adjacent waters.
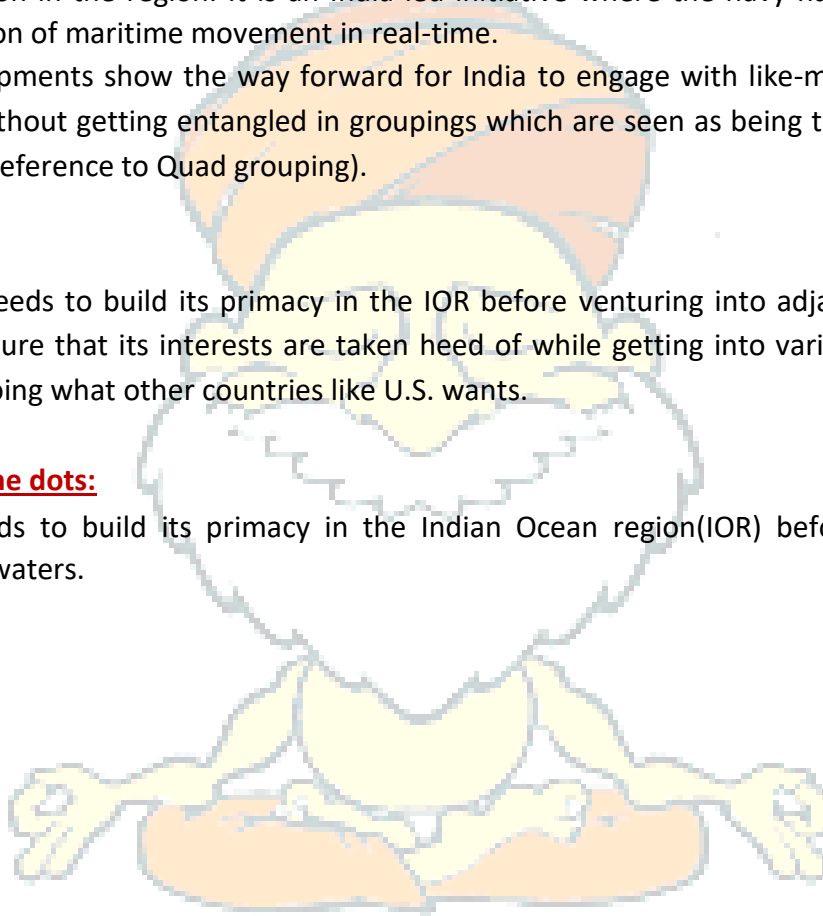
ENVIRONMENT/ECOLOGY

General Studies 3:
- *Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.*
- *Biodiversity.*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

Conservation of small species

Introduction:

The below article deals introduces us to some important critically endangered and threatened species and concerns with regard to flaws in animal conservation strategy, especially the small animals which are on the verge of extinction.

Concern:

- Most of the stakeholders - such as policy makers, bureaucrats, animal lovers, media, etc - give more priority to certain mega species and ignore small but equally important species.
- For instance, when a tiger or a rhino or an elephant dies, the tragic news straight away hit front pages of newspapers and attracts all policy actions from different stakeholders, which intent to avert another such death.
- However, several smaller species die, or are near extinction, or are threatened in India - which do not evoke the same public outcry or action.
- Some of this list includes – Great Indian Bustard, the house sparrow, the shy Indian pangolin, the caracal, the slender loris and the star tortoise among others

Need for a similar action on lines of Project Tiger/Elephant:

- Conservation of Tiger was given a superior and distinguished position and tigers were kept first among equals. Slogans were heard that 'in protecting the tiger we are protecting an ecosystem' (especially the high grasslands). But it is now time those animals in the dry grasslands and the mountains get same elevated position.
- Excellent conservation work has helped tiger population to prosper again in many tiger sanctuaries and has led to greater siting of the snow leopard in the snowy reaches of Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh.
- Similar support should be extended to its prey base and the less glamorous species of the region.

THE FORGOTTEN ONES

Case 1: Hog Deer

Pic Link: https://www.zoochat.com/community/media/hog-deer-axis-porcinus.191742/full?d=1341419297

- The **hog deer**, which are prolific breeders, were the principal food of the tiger in the grasslands of Corbett National Park in the sixties. There was an abundance of them and it was a major species of the park, vital for the survival of the tiger. Now there may be just 20 of them in Corbett and no one seems concerned.
- The Indian hog deer is a small deer whose habitat ranges from Pakistan, through northern India, to mainland southeast Asia, which inhabits much of the Indo-Gangetic Plains of Pakistan, northern India, Nepal, Bangladesh, southwestern Yunnan Province in China, all the way to western Thailand.
- IUCN Conservation status: Endangered (Threatened)
- Hog Deer is threatened by hunting and by habitat loss and degradation

Case 2: Chital

Pic Link: https://media1.britannica.com/eb-media/31/122931-004-434FE200.jpg

- The preferred food of the tiger is the chital. However, there were not enough of them in the sixties to provide sustenance for the tiger, so the focus was on the hog deer.
- The chital or cheetal also known as spotted deer or axis deer, is a species of deer that is native in the Indian subcontinent.
- IUCN Conservation status: Least Concern

Case 3: Great Indian Bustard

Pic Link: https://whitleyaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Great-Indian-bustard.jpg

- One of the rarest species and undoubtedly one of the most endangered is the Great Indian Bustard, which is the State bird of Rajasthan.

- Endemic to Jaisalmer and Pokhran, its habitat was severely damaged by the nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998. Once widely spotted across 11 Indian states, but their numbers now stand at 60 in Rajasthan and the world population of the bird may be just 80. In Gujarat, not a single adult male has been sited. Power lines are pushing out the birds.
- IUCN Conservation status: Critically Endangered

Case 4: Chevrotain/Mouse Deer

Pic   Link:
http://images.mentalfloss.com/sites/default/files/styles/insert_main_wide_image/public/istoc
k_000036051332_small.jpg

- The mouse deer (scientific name Chevrotain) is a miniature, just a foot high species of even-toed ungulates.
- It lives in rainforests and is nocturnal. It can be found in the Sal forests of south India, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.
- Mouse deer meat is said to be delectable and before the Wildlife Act came into existence, it cost thrice the price of any other meat. The mouse deer raises its young in the hollow of the fallen Sal, but unfortunately these trees are used as fuel wood.
- IUCN Conservation status: Least Concern

Case 5: Caracal

© Nedko P. Nedkov

Pic Link: https://i.pinimg.com/736x/2e/3c/f8/2e3cf8c8bfc3e79768520f3f9b35eeb7--bird-hunter-caracal.jpg

- The caracal has disappeared from the Kuno sanctuary of Madhya Pradesh. However, there are records of it being seen in Ranthambore in Rajasthan and in Kutch, Gujarat.
- The Indian Chevrotain inhabits most of the India, from Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the far south, north to at least 24°N, i.e. Mandla, Hoshangabad, Palamau and near Udaipur (Rajasthan)
- IUCN Conservation status: Least Concern

Case 6: Malabar civet cat

Pic link: https://i.pinimg.com/originals/8c/62/a5/8c62a5e9b324980317300d473be39c78.jpg

- Malabar civet, is a viverrid endemic to the Western Ghats of India. It is listed as Critically Endangered by IUCN as its population size is estimated to number fewer than 250 mature individuals, with no subpopulation greater than 50 individuals.
- It is feared that the Malabar civet cat may have gone into extinction.
- IUCN Conservation status: Critically Endangered

Case 7: Pangolin

- The pangolin, which can be found all over India, seems doomed because its scales, which are said to have medicinal value and are more expensive than gold, are sheared ruthlessly.
- Its meat too is in demand in China. Illegal trade continues not just in parts where there are tigers but also in parts where there are musk deer, otter, mongoose and other animals.
- IUCN Conservation status: Endangered

Case 8: Slender loris

- The slender loris, a nocturnal animal found in the Western Ghats, and the tortoise are traded in the pet market.
- IUCN Conservation status: Endangered

Conclusion:

Now with reports of nomadic Gujjars making forays into Dachigam, the **Hangul**, the only deer species of its kind, is down to around 200.

Manipur's State animal, the **brow-antlered deer or Sangai**, which lives on the floating morass of Loktak Lake, is also fighting for survival with numbers down to around 200. However, with Sangai festivals and Sangai tour services, Manipur is going all out to protect them.

With so many small animals on the verge of extinction, it is time we gave priority to animals on the basis of the threat perception to them. Today, we have the expertise to save them but lack the political will. They are perched on a precipice and unless we act, they will become as dead as the dodo.

Connecting the dots:

- Critically analyse government's conservation policies and discuss with examples the need for extending support to small species and especially the less glamorous species.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:

- *Environment and Ecology, Bio diversity - Conservation, environmental degradation, environmental impact assessment, Environment versus Development.*

- *Climate Change implications and mitigation strategies.*

Carbon Tax Policy/Cap-and-Trade Policy/Tax-and-Dividend Policy

Introduction:

Air pollution has become one of the biggest public concerns in India today.

- Around 19 lakh people die prematurely every year from diseases caused by outdoor and indoor air pollution – L**ancet Report**
- Lungs of children who grow up in polluted environments like Delhi are 10% smaller compared to the lungs of children who grow up in the U.S. – **Indian Journal of Pediatrics**

This is nothing short of a public health emergency. Therefore, there is urgent need for a comprehensive policy to curb pollution.

Carbon Dioxide A Necessary Evil

At the heart of the problem of pollution are carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions.

- About 75% of all greenhouse gas emissions are CO_2 emissions produced through burning fossil fuels — oil, coal and natural gas — to generate energy.
- Since the early 2000s, carbon emissions have increased because of high growth in the Indian economy.
- In 2014, India's total carbon emissions were more than three times the levels in 1990, as per World Bank data.

This is because of India's -

1) **heavy dependence on fossil fuels** and
2) dramatically **low level of energy efficiency**

The way ahead: Tax Carbon

Emissions can be curbed only if people are persuaded to move away from fossil fuels and adopt greener forms of energy. And the best way to achieve this is through **'taxing carbon'**.

Carbon tax is one of two major market-based options to lower emissions, the other being '**cap-and-trade schemes'**.

Concept of Carbon Tax

Pricing carbon emissions through a carbon fee is one of the most powerful incentives that governments have to encourage companies and households to pollute less by investing in cleaner technologies and adopting greener practices.

- A carbon tax is a way to make users of carbon fuels pay for the climate damage caused by releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. If set high enough, it becomes a powerful monetary disincentive that motivates switches to clean energy across the economy, simply by making it more economically rewarding to move to non-carbon fuels and energy efficiency.
- A shift by households, businesses and industry to cleaner technologies increases the demand for energy-efficient products and helps spur innovation and investment in green solutions.

Under this system, the **price to pollute** sets the strength of the economic signal and determines the extent to which green choices are encouraged.

For example, a stronger price on emissions will lead to more investment in cleaner energy sources such as solar and wind power. And although a carbon fee makes polluting activities more expensive, it makes green technologies more affordable as the price signal increases over time. Most importantly, a carbon tax gets green solutions into use.

Therefore, carbon tax must be a central part of our strategy for dramatically reducing carbon pollution, a view shared by economists and ecologists.

Concept of Cap-and-trade system:

- In a cap-and-trade system, government puts a firm limit, or cap, on the overall level of carbon pollution from industry and reduces that cap year after year to reach a set pollution target. As the cap decreases each year, it cuts industry's total greenhouse gas emissions to the limit set by regulation, and then forces polluters that exceed their emissions quota to buy unused quota from other companies.

Remodeling India's Energy Mix

The Indian economy's energy mix needs to be remodelled through investments in clean renewable sources of energy like solar, wind, hydro, geothermal and low-emissions bioenergy, and by raising the level of energy efficiency through investments in building retrofits, grid upgrades, and industrial efficiency.

According to an estimate, this energy mix overhaul requires an additional 1.5% of GDP (to the current annual level of 0.6%) annually over the next two decades.

- A part of the carbon revenue generated from Carbon Tax can be used for a systemic overhaul of the energy mix, which, to a large extent, would address the pressing problem of environmental degradation.
- Since the expenditure will be financed by the carbon tax revenue, it will be a revenue-neutral policy with no implications on the fiscal deficit.
- This policy not only curbs emissions but also delivers on providing more employment since the **employment elasticity in greener forms of energy is higher than those in fossil fuel-based energy**.

- A significant part of more than 3% of India's GDP currently spent on pollution-induced diseases will surely come down. If we want to breathe to live, India needs to make such a policy leap.

Concern with Carbon Tax:

1. **Carbon Tax is regressive in nature** — i.e., it affects the poor more than the rich.
   - This problem can be solved using a new policy – **'tax and dividend'** policy.
   - According to this 'tax and dividend' policy, the revenue thus generated is distributed equally across its citizens and as a result, the poor are more than compensated for the loss, since in absolute amounts the rich pay more carbon tax than the poor.
   - Or instead of a cash transfer, the other part of the carbon revenue can be used for an in-kind transfer of free electricity to the population that contributes less carbon than the economy average, and universal travel passes to compensate for the rise in transport costs and to encourage the use of green public transport.
   - Such a policy will justly addresses the widening schism/rift between **Bharat**, which bears the climate impact burden, and **India**, which is imposing that burden because of its lifestyle choices.

2. **Prices of almost all the commodities will rise –** Prices of all commodities (esp fuel and energy which has highest carbon content) will rise. For eg. the average price of electricity will rise from its current value of Rs. 3.73 to Rs. 4.67 per kWh.

Connecting the dots:

- What is a carbon tax? Examine how carbon tax can give a fillip to Climate Change mitigation.
- Is there a need to incorporate carbon tax or cap-and-tax system in our climate change mitigation strategy? Discuss.
- What is a carbon tax? What are the problems faced by India in adopting a high carbon tax regime in India?
- 'The future of climate change mitigation rests on successfully enacting comprehensive carbon tax or cap-and-tax system'. Do you agree? Examine.

TOPIC
General Studies 1:
- *Geography – Key natural resources across the world (including India), exploitation of natural resources*

General Studies 3:
- *Environment and Ecology, Bio diversity – Conservation, environmental degradation, environmental impact assessment, Environment versus Development*

Conserving Wetlands by identifying them right

Background:
Wetlands, a major water-based ecosystem apart from rivers, are at a moment of policy transition in the country.

- This year, a new legal framework for wetlands was passed, the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, replacing the earlier Rules of 2010.
- Also, this year the Supreme Court passed an order directing States to identify wetlands in the country within a stipulated timeframe.

Wetlands:
Wetland is transitional land between terrestrial and aquatic eco-systems where water table is usually at or near surface or it may be land covered by shallow water. Importance- Wetlands supports rich biodiversity and provides wide range of ecosystem services such as water storage and purification, flood mitigation, erosion control, aquifer recharge etc. In India there are 115 wetlands officially identified by Central Government. Out of these, 26 have identified as wetlands of international importance under Ramsar Convention designated as Ramsar sites.

Maintaining 'Ecological character' of wetlands:
The 2010 and 2017 Rules for wetlands both emphasise that the ecological character of wetlands ought to be maintained for their conservation. 'Ecological character' refers to processes and components which make the wetland a particular, and sometimes unique, ecosystem. For example, as lagoons like Chilika (Odisha) and Pulicat (Tamil Nadu/Andhra Pradesh) are characterised by a mix of saline and fresh water, the flows of each type need to be maintained; river flood plains contain wetlands that require conservation so they can re-fuel the river with fish and other aquatic life during flooding.

Issues:
The 2017 Wetland Rules have been criticised for doing away with strong wetland monitoring systems and omitting important wetland types.

- In the 2010 Rules, some criteria related to ecological character were made explicit, such as natural beauty, ecological sensitivity, genetic diversity, historical value, etc. These have been omitted in the 2017 Rules.
- There is multiple interest around wetlands. Multiple interests also have governance needs, and this makes it absolutely necessary to identify and map these multiple uses. It is crucial to identify ecological criteria so that the wetlands' character can be maintained.

The key to wetland conservation is not just understanding regimes of multiple use — but conserving or managing the integrity of the wetland ecosystem.

- Restriction of activities on wetlands will be done as per the principle of '**wise use**', determined by the State wetland authority under the 2017 rules. Whether wise use will include maintaining ecological character is not clear. Under the new Rules, no authority to issue directions, which are binding in nature to desist from any activity detrimental to wetland conservation, has been prescribed to State wetland authorities.

- Salt pans as 'wetlands' have been omitted from the new Rules. They were identified as wetlands in the 2010 Rules, as they are often important sites of migratory birds and other forms of biodiversity. The omission in the 2017 Rules suggests that while saltpans do exist as wetlands, they do not require any conservation or ecological balance. Salt pans are an example how one use (of making salt) has trumped the other (of environmental balance).

Case study: Deepor Beel

The issue of wetlands being multiple-use areas — and subsequently being abused due to clashes of interest — found centre-stage this year with the observations of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in the case of Deepor Beel. Deepor Beel is a Ramsar site and a part of it is also wildlife sanctuary in Guwahati, Assam. This wetland harbours a wide variety of biodiversity, and also suffers from intense man-made pressure — the city's municipal waste is dumped close to the Beel. Large, meat-eating storks (Greater adjutant storks) are ironically found eating from the mountains of garbage at the site. Potential impacts of contamination or poisoning from the garbage are still unknown. This January, 26 storks died. The fact that Deepor Beel exists as a wetland does not prevent garbage dumping; is a fate faced by many wetlands. These are ways of killing a wetland and turning it from a wet to a dry ecosystem; or from a lake to a garbage dump or cesspool.

Conclusion:

There are challenges ahead in identifying wetlands – multiple and competing use is one of them.

- Understanding the historic spread and ecological character of wetlands will be an important bulwark for the way forward.
- Setting clear governance systems would be the next.

Without either there will be dilution of wetlands in the country.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you understand by the term 'wetland'. Why are they important as an ecosystem? Identifying wetlands is a challenging task. Discuss.

- Discuss the issues associated with the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017. Also suggest way forward.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:

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

Expanding 'good' green cover in India

In news: The Centre is not ready with the rules to implement the **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016**. This demonstrates that the government's resolve to meet a variety of environmental objectives, including major commitments under the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals, remains woefully weak.

Background:

- Diversion of forests for non-forest use seems inevitable to some degree due to developmental activities and biotic pressures. Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016, seeks to remedy this loss through disbursal of national and State funds for carrying out afforestation projects.
- While 40,000 crores have already been accumulated for compensatory projects, the rules for the implementation of the act haven't been drafted yet.

Is compensation justifiable or enough?

- It is debatable if compensation is a sound remedy for loss of rich forests. Case study- About 13,000 hectares were compensated in the Sardar Sarovar Dam project, but only with patchy outcomes: healthy monoculture plantations having low biodiversity value came up in some places, while others resulted in unhealthy plantations with few trees.
- Replacing a natural forest with a plantation does not really serve the cause of nature, wildlife, or the forest-dwelling communities who depend on it, because of the sheer loss of biodiversity.

Way forward:

- Diversion of forests for non-forest use seems inevitable to some degree. Thus to maintain biodiversity, it is necessary to make an assessment of suitable lands, preferably contiguous with protected areas that can be turned over for management to a joint apparatus consisting of forest department staff and scientific experts.

- Putting in place a scientific national plan to expand good green cover is essential, since the sequestration of carbon through sustainably managed forests is a key component of the commitment made under the Paris Agreement. There is already a Green India Mission, which is distinct from the framework envisaged for compensatory afforestation.
- The Centre needs to enable independent audit of all connected programmes, in order to sensibly deploy the financial resources now available. There is immense potential to augment the services of forests through a careful choice of plants and trees under the afforestation programme. All this can make a beginning only with the actualisation of the law passed in 2016.
- The method used to calculate the net present value(NPV) of forests, taking into account all ecosystem services they provide, is far from perfect, as many scientists point out. This needs to be seen. NPV calculation must be scientifically credible.

Conclusion:

The momentum for compensatory afforestation has come from judicial directives but now the government should give a foundation of rules to the law passes in 2016. A scientific national plan to expand good green cover is absolutely essential.

Connecting the dots:

- A major governance challenge in India is poor implementation of robust laws. Critically analyze.
- A scientific national plan to expand good green cover is absolutely essential in India. Discuss.
- Discuss the issues with Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, 2016.
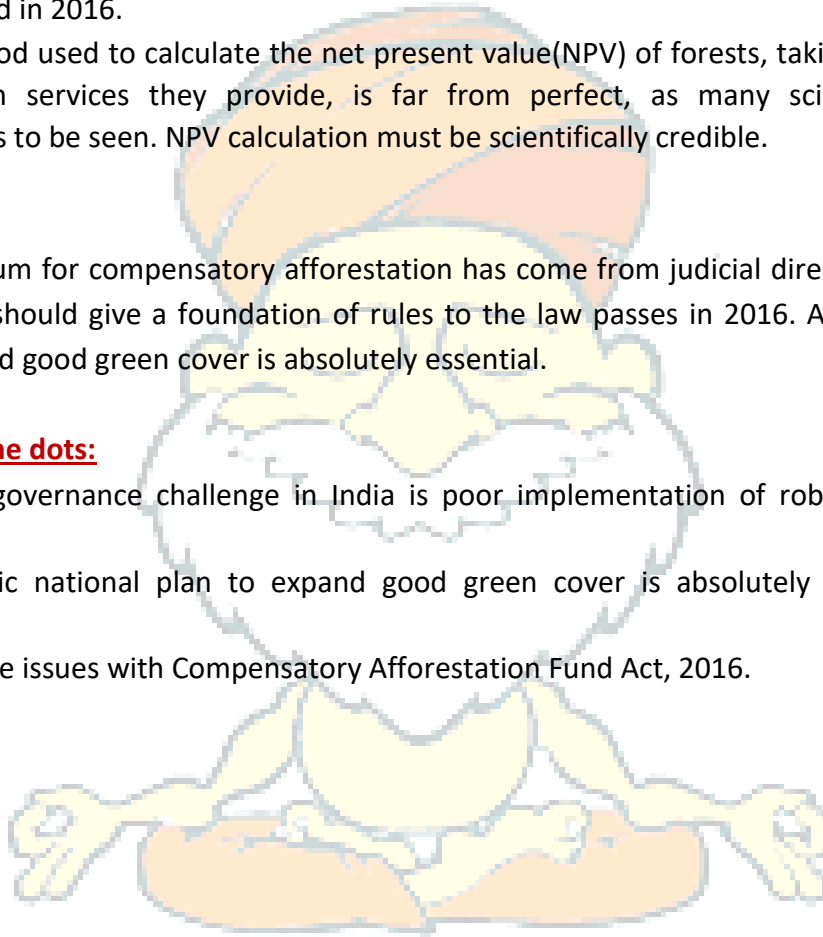
ECONOMY

TOPIC: *General studies 3:*
- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*
- *Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.*

Retreat of globalisation

Background:
- U.S. Trump's opposition to globalisation is stark. He is still to appoint his emissaries to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Opposed to multilateralism in trade, he also wants American corporations to invest less abroad.

But globalisation's retreat is not confined to the US alone.

- Germany, Britain, France and Italy are the four biggest European economies. Via Brexit, Britain has already given in to an inward-looking pullback; right wing populist political forces are showing signs of revival in Italy.

A right-wing populist party has emerged from nowhere in Germany to become the third largest party in parliament, causing a substantial erosion of popular support for the centre right and centre left, and making it hard for a government to emerge.

What is globalisation?

In its purest economic form, globalisation represents free movement of capital, goods and labour across national boundaries.

The reality, of course, departed from this ideal type. Compared to capital and goods, labour was always allowed lower freedom to move.

Moreover, since different countries opted for varying degrees of integration with the global economy, even the movement of capital and goods, while less constrained than before, was not entirely free.

India and China globalised incrementally, and Argentina in the mid-1990s. Hundred years until the First World War constituted the first era of globalisation. Since last four decades we are seeing globalisation 2.0.

Meaning of gloablisation:
- Greater economic freedom beyond national borders than perhaps ever before.
- Within that larger trend, freer movement of capital and goods than of labour.

India and China:

They have been two of the biggest beneficiaries of Globalisation 2.0. In 1980, China and India were not even among the 45 largest economies of the world. In 2016, China's GDP was second only to the US and India's GDP was the seventh largest in the world.

What is forcing the retreat?
- It is not economic arguments against globalisation that have forced the retreat.
- It is the new political forces that have done so.
- If market-based economics mastered politics for the last four decades, politics is now displaying its mastery over economic policy..

Economic arguments against full-blown globalisation:
- In 1998, Jagdish Bhagwati, famous for his arguments in favour of trade globalisation, wrote vehemently against free movement of capital, arguing that capital markets were prone to extreme instability unlike trade in goods, which was more stable.
- Economists have argued against unrestricted free trade, claiming that many losers from trade liberalisation would lose permanently. All boats would not be lifted.
- The freer the trade, the bigger the government would have to be — to help those hurt by trade liberalisation.

Political contentions that have reshaped the emerging trends:
- There is a grave imbalance between the global nature of markets and the national scope of state sovereignty.
  If wages in the US are high, businesses can simply move overseas, hurting US work force. Greater popular control over capital, according to this argument, was necessary.
- Even though movement of labour across national boundaries has been less free than the movement of capital and goods, international migration has nonetheless been more substantial than before.
- The anti-immigrant wave of politics, often taking ugly racist forms, is born out of the anxiety produced by the changing demographic composition of polities. In the US, the Hispanics and Muslims became the object of a majoritarian ire; in France, North African Muslims; in Britain, new migrants from Europe and elsewhere; in Germany, refugees from the Middle East, etc.

Conclusion:
- Labour migration will almost certainly be badly hurt: Ethnicity continues to be an obsessive concern of modern nation-states.
- Capital is likely to be hit least. Its power is ubiquitous.
- Moreover, the complex supply chains and other international networks in which businesses have got deeply embedded cannot be easily broken.

In sum, globalisation is in retreat, but nationalist politics is unlikely to touch nationalist economics.

Connecting the dots:

- Globalization is in retreat. Critically analyze.

TOPIC
General Studies 3

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

- *Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.*

- *Investment models and Inclusive Growth.*

Concept of Sovereign/Social wealth fund

What is Social wealth fund or Sovereign wealth fund?

- A social wealth fund or sovereign wealth fund (SWF) is a **state-owned investment fund** that invests in real and financial assets such as stocks, bonds, real estate, precious metals, or in alternative investments such as private equity fund or hedge funds and whose **dividends would be paid out directly to the citizenry**.
- The funding for a sovereign wealth fund (SWF) comes from central bank reserves that accumulate as a result of budget and trade surpluses, and from revenue generated from the exports of natural resources.
- Unlike, the state-operated funds which are used in a discretionary manner that helps countries (for example Saudi Arabia) generate revenues and whose benefits end up flowing to the country's richest. A social wealth fund would guarantee that the income from capital assets gets distributed widely—perhaps as a universal basic income.

Background/History:

- The term "sovereign wealth fund" was first used in 2005 by Andrew Rozanov in an article entitled, "Who holds the wealth of nations?"
- Sovereign wealth funds have existed for more than a century, but since 2000, the number of sovereign wealth funds has increased dramatically.

Establishment of SWF:

The motives for establishing a sovereign wealth fund vary by country.

- For example, the United Arab Emirates generates a large portion of its revenue from exporting oil and needs a way to protect the surplus reserves from oil-based risk, thus it places a portion of that money in a sovereign wealth fund.
- Japan faces the dilemma of a growing elderly population combined with a dwindling labor force and negative government bond yields. The nation's public pension system is designed to have contributions from the working populace support its elderly citizens. Japan places these contributions as a SWF investing in global equities.

Many nations use sovereign wealth funds as a way to accrue profit for the benefit of the nation's economy and its citizens.

Objectives of SWF:

- The primary functions of a sovereign wealth fund are to stabilize the country's economy through diversification and to generate wealth for future generations.

Every SWF has its own unique purpose and objective, but the general aim is to do something that will benefit the country as a whole. Some possible objectives include:

- Fund social or economic projects to boost growth and employment.
- Get political mileage and increase vote share.
- Provide long-term capital growth opportunities for the domestic market.
- Protect the economy from excess volatility due to revenues or exports.
- Provide stability against oil price fluctuations.
- Diversify portfolio with an aim to create savings for the future generation.

Benefits:

SWFs offer a variety of economic and financial benefits.

- The SWFs of several nations enable governments to augment resources and achieve strategic objectives.
- SWF's earnings will diversify a country's revenues and augment foreign exchange reserves or commodity revenues.
- It helps to acquire strategic stakes in oil and gold companies.
- They help avoid boom-bust cycles in their home countries, and facilitate the saving and transfer across generations of proceeds from fiscal surpluses related to commodity exports and privatizations.
- Countries such as China and Singapore have used SWFs to meet their commodity import requirements, promote the expansion of domestic companies overseas, attract foreign direct investment and increase government revenues.
- They help to combat inequality and provide macroeconomic stability.
- SWFs would be socially owned and could be used to finance a range of public projects that benefit society as a whole. These might include investment in economic and social

infrastructure and urban regeneration and strengthening mechanisms that encourage upward social mobility.

Conclusion:

SWFs can generate a sizeable fund over time, enough to fund a range of social programmes and possibly an annual citizen's dividend, through a modest contribution from a very privileged social group.

Depending on how they are financed, these funds have the potential to be a powerful weapon in the anti-inequality armoury, they would boost social investment and greatly improve the overall balance sheet of the public finances in the process.

The emergence of sovereign wealth funds is an important development for international investing, and as regulation and transparency issues are resolved in the coming years, these funds are likely to take on a major role in shaping the global economy.

The Government of India (GoI) incorporating an SWF would facilitate achieving key political and economic goals.

Connecting the dots:
- What do you mean by the term 'Social wealth fund' or 'Sovereign wealth fund'? Discuss the objectives and benefits of establishing such a fund.

For further reference: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/10/what-you-need-to-know-about-sovereign-wealth-funds/?utm_content=buffereb343&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

TOPIC
General Studies 3:
- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*
- *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.*
- *Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security.*

Is it time to regulate BIG TECH?

Introduction:
The Big Tech – Apple Inc., Google parent Alphabet Inc., Facebook Inc. and Amazon.com Inc. and other digital giants – are being blamed for a number of things, such as:

- Engaging in monopolistic practices;
- Not doing enough to curb fake news; and
- Violating the privacy of users etc.

They have also been blamed for stagnation in wages and the decline in labour's share of gross domestic product (GDP). And the biggest charge against Big Tech is that it is becoming a threat to freedom of expression and democracy itself.

They stand accused of transgressions such as selling campaign ads, underpaying corporate taxes, destroying jobs and condoning sexual harassment and gender disparity.

Studies conducted by some Business schools points out that:

- "In the last year, 85% of the increase in ads online was shared by Google and Facebook". As a disproportionate beneficiary of online advertisement revenue, Google and Facebook have effectively become gatekeepers of information that is accessible to users of their platforms.
- Companies like Google and Facebook have built up their dominant positions not just through world-leading coding and (sometimes) cut-throat business practices. They've also done it through an uncanny ability to get consumers to trust them — often with the most personal data about themselves.
- Their major source of power is a "platform" that can be used to control markets and discourage competition.
- They also stand widely accused of the sins associated with corporate bullies: crushing competition, avoiding taxes, undermining democracy and invading privacy.

Critics have argued that tech giants are the new robber barons, using their money and market muscle to bypass laws and social norms — and undermine democracy. They call for government actions to curb the effects of excess market power.

Limiting their growth through break-ups and tough regulations:

Critics and experts demand that tech giants should be regulated like public utilities and prevented from expanding further through acquisitions.

- The European Union fined Google 2.4 billion euros ($2.8 billion) in June for abusing its search-engine dominance by favoring its own shopping service over competitors' in search results.
- The U.S. Federal Trade Commission is investigating similar charges against Google whether it violated its commitments made to the FTC to preserve competition.

Some have demanded for break-up of big giants as a solution just like how Standard Oil, AT&T and Microsoft were split into pieces. (Standard Oil was splintered into 34 independent companies in 1911. American Telephone & Telegraph Co. were split in 1980s).

Conclusion:

All the main players face questions about whether they harm democracy, people's health, fair competition, economic equality and privacy. This has been front-page news throughout this year and a hot topic in business circles and among politicians on the left and right.

However, demanding the break-up of these tech giants is excessive and unwarranted. Industries in which these superstar firms emerge are also the ones which have experienced high levels of innovation, as measured by citation-weighted patents or total factor productivity growth.

Regulators around the world should frame rules to make it mandatory for these tech firms to seek user consent before using personal data and be more open about how the data is used.

"It is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant." – Shakespeare

Connecting the dots:

- Tech giants (such as Apple, Google parent Alphabet Inc., Facebook and Amazon) should be regulated like public utilities and prevented from expanding further through acquisitions. Do you agree? Critically comment.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:
- *Economic Development – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;*
- *Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.*
- *Inclusive growth and Challenges of inequality.*

India's high inequality is hurting growth

Introduction:

India is suddenly in the news for all the wrong reasons. It is now hitting the headlines as one of the most unequal countries in the world, whether one measures inequality on the basis of income or wealth.

The **World Inequality Report 2018** has provided data on inequality across various countries.

World Inequality Report (WIR) is a report published by the **World Inequality Lab** at the Paris School of Economics, is "based on the latest evidence collected for the World Wealth and Income Database, a massive project maintained by more than 100 researchers in more than 70 countries."

WIR highlights the following:

- Inequality as a rule exists everywhere in the world, where the rich have become proportionately richer than the other groups in the last three decades or so.
- India's inequality looks more skewed. The share of the top 10 per cent in total national income in 2016 in India was 55 per cent. It was 47 per cent for the US, 37 per cent for Europe and 41 per cent for China.
- In our country, the top 1 per cent holds 22 per cent of total income which was only below 28 per cent for Brazil. In case of China, it was 14 per cent and 13 per cent for Europe.
- According to one more study, India is the second-most unequal country globally, with millionaires controlling 54% of its wealth.

This should give an indication of the concentration of income in certain pockets.

Income inequality around year 2011 (household per capita income)

Pic link: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/inequality-in-india-oxfam-explainer/
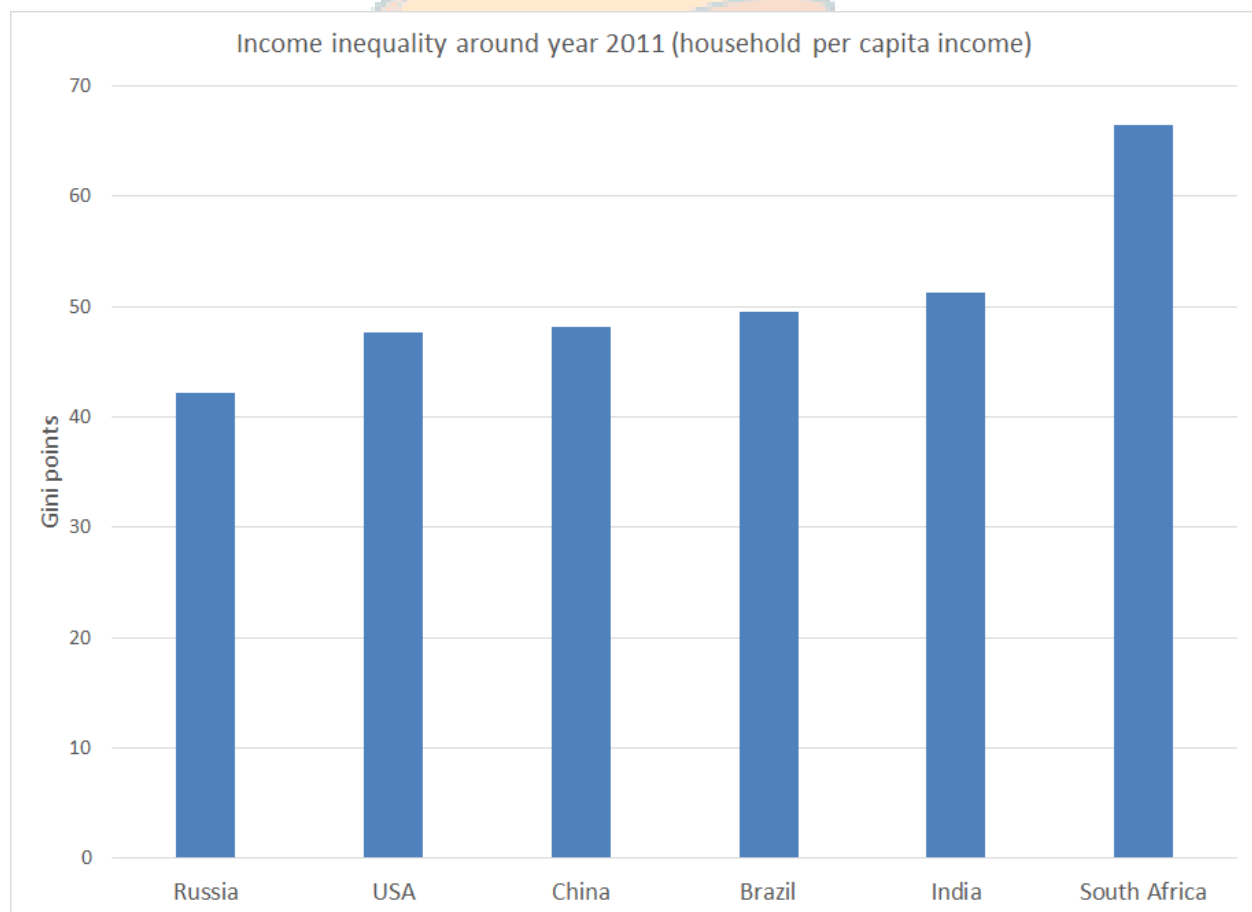
Wrong growth

There are two other interesting parameters which are spoken about here in the report.

- The **first** is <u>**cumulative growth per adult**</u> between 1980 and 2014. Given the low base, growth was 223 per cent for this period in case of India. For the bottom 50 per cent it was 107 per cent and 112 per cent for the middle 40 per cent, while for the top 10 per cent it was 469 per cent.
- More alarming is the income growth for the top 1 per cent where it was 857 per cent. This is probably a sharper measure of inequality as it speaks of growth in income over various groups where the richest has witnessed the highest increase over higher base numbers compared with the other categories.
- The **second metric** is the <u>**share of income growth of various classes**</u> for the period 1980-2016. The bottom 50 per cent had a share of just 11 per cent. The middle 40 per cent had 23 per cent, one of the lowest across regions like the World, the US, Europe, and China. The top 10 per cent had share of 66 per cent (same as in the US but much lower than in Europe with 48 per cent and China 43 per cent) and top 1 per cent, 28 per cent. This talks of which groups have gained the most on account of cumulative growth.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the above data.

- First, the **level of inequality is very high** in the country and cannot be disputed.
- Second, the **benefits of growth have been extremely skewed towards the rich**.

So, let us examine how did this happen?

<u>**Economic reforms**</u> have actually widened the wedge.

- In other words, the **growth model followed since reforms** was tilted towards the productive sectors and liberalisation meant less of government and more of private enterprise.
- This was the chosen route to growth and hence it was felt that if the private sector was given space for expansion, the benefits would percolate downwards (or trickle down) through employment opportunities as well as higher living standards.

However, this has not happened according to script and the benefits have largely flowed to the upper echelons.

In fact, this **limited growth syndrome** acts as a useful social buffer as it gives the illusion of upward mobility even though the pace is much slower than that of the higher echelons. Therefore, it is not surprising that 90 per cent of the population accounted for just a third of the growth taking place during the period 1980-2016.

Private push

Economic reforms were focused on **de-nationalisation**. Privatisation meant that even public companies would be owned by private players, which began the process of heightened inequality.

Governments have dithered (on two minds) on subsidies and the elite are anti-subsidy. The result has been that even government activity has tended to move towards private projects generation in roads and city development (privatization). Therefore, when a road is created the contracts go to private parties, which increases income of the relatively richer echelons.

Crony capitalism

Curiously, the distribution by the government of relief payments to the unemployed under NREGA scheme has been criticized and expressed sharp disapproval by many, as it has pushed up wages beyond productivity levels and affected corporate profits!

This is so as NREGA wage has become a benchmark for all wages in industry.

There is hence relentless pressure from the corporate world on the government to lower these allocations on grounds of its distorting the wage structure.

This kind of growth of crony capitalism and growing nexus between the government and some corporates has exacerbated the income distribution pattern.

Privatisation programmes are normally for better performing companies — which is natural or else they would not be of interest to the private sector. Loss-making companies continue to be held by the Government. This is another reason which has fostered the inequality syndrome in the country.

Demand saturation, and more

Higher inequality comes in the way of demand creation.

Economic growth is sustainable provided the poor are also able to rise in the hierarchy and spend on goods and services. If these incomes do not rise, the demand cycle is interrupted. Therefore, it is essential to keep their income increasing at a reasonable rate.

The problem we have today of **absence of demand** is because of inequality.

The rich run into a cliff of **'demand-saturation'** where motor vehicles cannot be changed every year or houses bought periodically. The other income groups too have to spend. If they do not have this money or other means needed for a particular purpose, as is the case in the last three years, the tendency would be to spend more on essentials than consumer goods which impact growth.

Conclusion:

Tackling inequality and reducing the gap between citizens is ironically a necessity to keep the economy ticking.

In the West, high levels of prosperity across the citizens was one reason for expanding markets overseas. We do have a large populace that needs to move up the ladder or else will continue witnessing growth in waves rather than in a linear manner.

Connecting the dots:
- Discuss the main causes for high level of economic inequality in India. What can India do to reduce inequality?
- Unless we make an effort to first contain and then reduce the rising levels of extreme inequality, the dream of ending extreme poverty will remain a pipe dream. Elucidate.

TOPIC
General Studies 3:
- *Economic Development – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;*
- *Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.*
- *Inclusive growth and Challenges of inequality.*

Countering inequality in India: Lessons from China

In news: The release recently of the **World Inequality Report 2018** has brought into focus an aspect of economic progress in India- the *continuous growth in inequality since the mid-1980s*. The top 1% of income earners received 6% of the total income in the early 1980s, close to 15% of it in 2000, and receives 22% today. As this is a report on a global scale, we can see the trend in inequality across the world, providing a comparative perspective across countries.

A comparison between India and China: Since 1980, while the Chinese economy has grown 800% and India's a far lower 200%, inequality in China today is considerably lower than in India. The share of the top 1% of the Chinese population is 14% as opposed to the 22% reported for India.

This shows that growing inequality need not necessarily accompany faster growth, observing that inequality actually declined in China from the early 21st century. By then China had grown faster for longer than most countries of the world ever did.

How meaningful the above comparison is? Though representing different political systems, they had both been large agrarian economies at similar levels of per capita income when they had started out in the early 1950s. Moreover, the absence of democracy in a society does not by itself guarantee faster economic growth and greater income equality. For a populous poor

country to lift itself to a higher growth path and stay there requires imaginative public policy and a steady governance.

Lessons from China:

- Its leadership combined the drive for growth with the spreading of human capital. Human capital may be understood as a person's endowment derived from education and robust health. The share of the Indian population with secondary schooling is less than 15%. China had by the early 1970s achieved the level of schooling India did only by the early 21st century.

- The spread of health and education in that country enabled the Chinese economy to grow faster than India by exporting manufactures to the rest of the world. These goods may not have been the byword for quality but they were globally competitive, which made their domestic production viable. The resulting growth lifted vast multitudes out of poverty.

As the human capital endowment was relatively equal, most people could share in this growth, which accounts for the relative equality of outcomes in China when compared to India. An added advantage is the greater participation of women in the workforce of China, an outcome that isn't true for India.

Indian context:

India has lower per capita income, persistent poverty and by all accounts rising inequality. Economic progress here has been **neither efficient nor equitable**. Democracy per se cannot be held responsible for this. There are States in India with superior social indicators than China. This shows that not only is democracy not a barrier to development but also that similar political institutions across India have not resulted in same development outcomes across its regions.

Way forward: Deepening democracy

Given the growing inequality in India, the direction that public policy should now take is evident.

- There is need to spread health and education far more widely amidst the population. India's full panoply of interventions, invariably justified as being pro-poor, have not only not spread human capital, but they have also not been able to prevent a growing income inequality.

- We now need to reorient public policy so that the government is more enabling of private entrepreneurship while being directly engaged in the **equalisation of opportunity through a social policy** that raises health and education levels at the bottom of the pyramid, as China has done.

Connecting the dots:

- China fares far better than India when it comes to income inequality. Discuss the reasons behind. What lessons India can take from China?

Also read: India's high inequality is hurting growth https://iasbaba.com/2017/12/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-prelims-mains-focus-21st-december-2017/

INFRASTRUCTURE/DISASTER MANAGEMENT

TOPIC
General Studies 3:
- *Infrastructure*
- *Disaster and disaster management.*

Cyclone Ockhi – Loopholes in Disaster Management

What is a disaster? A disaster is an event causing extreme disruption in a society's functioning. It results in widespread human, material, and environmental losses which are beyond the ability of the affected people to cope with on their own. Most disasters — floods, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides — are due to nature's fury. When a disaster causes death and destruction, it becomes a calamity beyond human endurance.

Cyclone Ockhi:
Cyclone Ockhi struck Kanniyakumari district in Tamil Nadu and parts of Kerala on November 29th night and 30th morning.
As per the information given by fishermen associations in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, over 120 fishermen are dead and about 900 are still missing. The Tamil Nadu government continues to be in denial mode as far as the number of deaths is concerned, although there is some consensus on the number of people missing. Cyclone Ockhi has left a massive trail of destruction in Kanniyakumari district. It is here that the government's rapid response by way of disaster management should have stepped in.

Failure in damage control:
- The cyclone warning was delayed.

- The warning, when it came, was ineffective because it could not be conveyed to thousands of fisherfolk who were already out at sea.
- Once the cyclone struck, there was no war-like mobilisation and action, which are the hallmarks of good disaster management.
- Cyclone Ockhi's devastation started within 12 hours of the first "rough seas" warning that was put out on November 29. Given the limited quantity of fish in nearshore waters, many fisherfolk have diversified into deep-sea and long-distance fishing. The Indian Meteorological Department's timing of the cyclone forecast was futile.
- Action plans should have kicked in and the Indian Coast Guard, with its seaborne vessels and helicopters, should have launched emergency search and rescue operations. Had this been done, hundreds of fishing boats and fishermen would have been found and rescued within the shortest possible time.
- The Indian Navy with its vast array of ships, aircraft and state-of-the-art technology should have stepped in immediately. This too did not happen.
- The National Disaster Management Act (2005), the National Policy on Disaster Management (2009), the National Disaster Management Plan (2016) and the National Disaster Response Force and infrastructure created thereof didn't come to rescue.

Way forward:

The cyclone has also resulted in massive losses to the livelihoods of people living in the coasts due to the destruction of crops, banana, rubber, coconut and forest trees. Relief and rehabilitation is going to be a monumental task and the State government alone cannot take the huge burden of providing a decent compensation to the victims of the cyclone. This calls for the combined efforts of the Central and State government (departments of agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and fisheries) and various departments (rubber board, coconut board, spices board, etc.)

Connecting the dots:

- The huge devastation caused by Cycle Okchi reflects the loopholes in disaster management in India. Critically analyze.

TOPIC

General Studies 1:

- *Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.*

General studies 2 and 3:

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

Solving the problem of Fires Accidents: Mitigation and Prevention strategy

Introduction:

On an average, in India, every year, about 25,000 persons die due to fires and related causes. Probably many of these deaths could have been prevented, had we taken enough fire protection measures. No comprehensive data is available in India on the economic losses suffered on account of fires.

Recently, on the night of December 28, 14 people died and 54 others were injured as the result of a fire at a restaurant in Mumbai's Kamala Mills.

There were at least 11 major fires in Mumbai alone this year, of which the second-last one on December 25 killed 12 workers in a Gujarati snack shop in Saki Naka. The greater number of these cases occurred in factories or small manufacturing units.

The onus of the majority of these fires rests with the owners of the places. But whether the fires took place in residential buildings, work places or restaurants, the main culprit is the respective State Municipal Corporation within the Indian polity.

The real concern: Unplanned Urban Planning

- It is mandatory for every single new residential building (in many cities) to have a rigorous fire audit before it gets an occupancy certificate. One cannot stress the need for zero tolerance of any short-coming, flaw or missing element. The same holds for every factory, laboratory, office, school, workshop, library, zoo, museum, research facility, restaurant, four and five-star hotel and any other building.
- However, these pre-conditions are not tested prior to getting the occupancy certificate.
- Lack of fire escape routes in buildings and mock fire drills are common in most Indian cities.
- The manner in which some areas are laid out, there are urban villages which are unplanned, unorganised sections of settlements. These are places where the road-width is so small that even a fire tender may not go in. For instance, in Delhi, certain urban chic places such as Hauz Khas Village, Shahpur Jat are firetraps.
- The fire rescue has to be motorcycle-based in these places because even four-wheelers may not reach.

Mitigation Strategy:

- For mitigating a fire in any occupancy, whether it is a business house or in a factory or in a residential building, require a deep understanding about the problem, comprehensive Fire Safety Audit, regular inspection, maintenance and repair of defective equipment.

- Infrastructure in place- fire-stations equipped with modern technology and well trained fire-fighters, dedicated helpline to reduce response time- mapping of cities using color coded zones based on their level of vulnerability.
- Adherence to SOPs' (Standard Operating Procedures), since in many cases Standard Operating Procedures are already in place but are not implemented due to untrained staff/inadequate numbers of deployment or political interference
- On ground execution- mandatory fire safety drills & training for response at all public and private work places, schools, educational institutions- courses for people interested in being volunteers in case of fire-incidents.
- Arrangements for speedy medical attention should be done by ensuring prior medical aid at event location, implementing concepts like green corridor

Prevention strategy:

- Fires start when source of ignition comes into contact with combustible material. If we can control all sources of ignition and combustible material, we can greatly reduce the potential for fire. Adhering to explosion resistant building codes and reorientation of all existing infrastructures to make it fire resistant.
- Heating and lighting systems that are inadequately maintained or safeguarded present risks. Many fires occur from electrical faults or misuse. Smoking is a notorious fire risk. It should be prohibited in all areas where it is especially dangerous. Strict quality checks and standards of electrical appliances, equipments, households items like stoves etc that often are cause of fire accidents.
- Automatic fire sprinklers coupled with detection are the most effective fire protection system found in High Rise buildings which can, not only detect the fires, but also extinguish the fires in the initial stage itself. Application of Water Mist in various situation is gaining momentum every day.
- Major fires start in storage area and warehouses than production areas. Poorly stored goods, even though they are not flammable, may help to spread fire and hinder fire fighters gaining access to the seat of the fire or reduce the effectiveness of sprinkler systems. Goods tidily stored with gangways may help to inhibit the spread of fire.
- The legislations, standards and codes have a vital role in forcing the occupiers to provide the required fire protection system, both active and passive. Complying with all the fire and safety measures and adhering to the National Building Code of India, 2005.

The way ahead:

Notions of safety, security and quality are not built into us from school level. We don't get basic first aid training. Our cultural attitude is one of "chalta hai" (It is Okay!!) and we think the next building will catch fire, not ours. It will happen to somebody else not me.

The buildings have to be planned, designed and detailed to be fire safe. There have to be fire audits of each of the buildings every six months, or at least once in a year.

There has to be a safety officer who sits in a room with CCTV monitors, sprinkler systems, fire alarm systems, fire extinguishers. Often people are not trained how to use the fire extinguisher, and which one to use when. We have national building codes, local building bylaws, national electrical codes. But they are never implemented or enforced because of systemic problems.

There should be lessons learnt from the fatal fire in Mumbai. By properly blending both precautionary and mitigation measures, we can greatly reduce the adverse impacts of a fire hazard and thereby prevent the loss of lives and property.

Connecting the dots:

- There were many incidents of major fire tragedies in our country. What precautions should be taken to prevent fire hazards? What are the mitigative measures for fire accidents? Discuss.
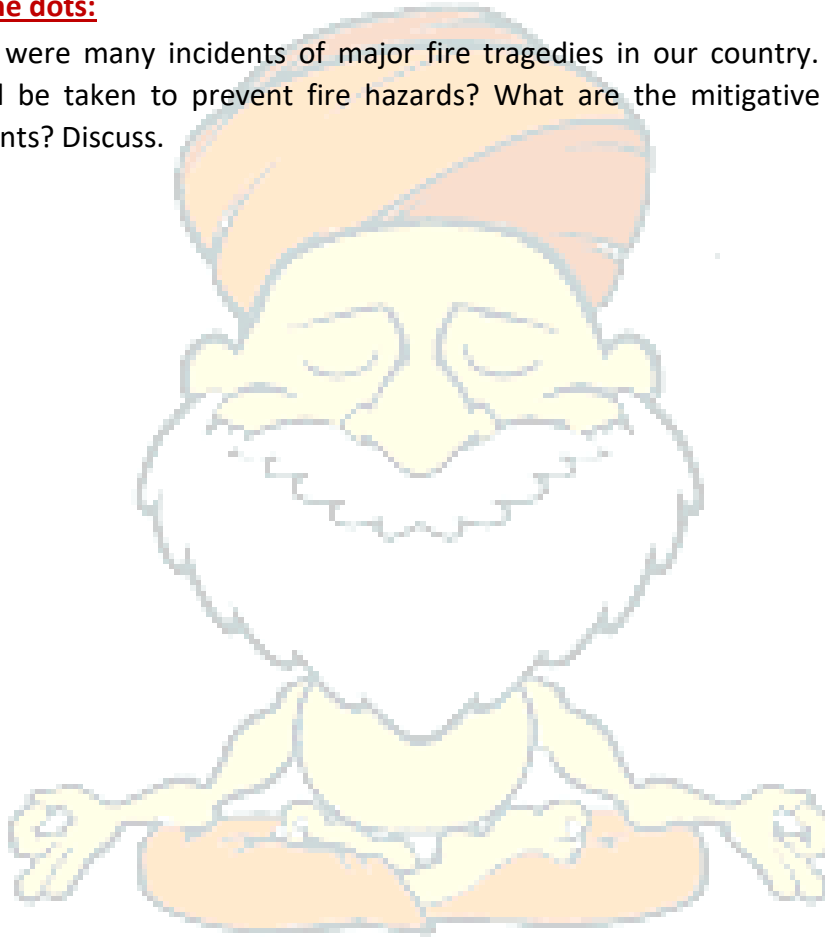
GOVERNANCE

TOPIC
General Studies 2:
- *Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.*

Party reform in India

Introduction:
In India there is no real movement towards democratisation of parties; the selection of candidates, Chief Ministers and office-bearers of party units is usually left to the discretion of a handful of leaders who take decisions behind closed doors. India's success in consolidating a democratic system of government has paradoxically forestalled pressure for party reform. Taken as a whole, the electoral process is more representative but political parties look a lot like oligarchies. Most parties are subservient to one supreme leader. Political parties still refuse to lay down settled and predictable procedures for almost everything they do, from the selection of candidates to the framing of a manifesto.The question of party reform is a pressing one in India.

Issues:
- The lack of institutionalisation and, partly as a consequence, democratisation. The biggest weakness of parties is that they are leader-centric and most leaders are unwilling to institutionalise procedures for the selection of candidates and increase the participation of members in party functioning. As a rule, strong leaders rarely support institutionalisation because it constrains their discretion and personal power.
- The lack of internal democracy in the party. The practice of adhering to the principle of dynastic succession in contrast to the rise of party workers to top echelons. Quite a few political families have sprung up in the recent past, and more are mushrooming.
- Nearly all parties are centralised in their decision-making and have been run from the top down in terms of distribution of party tickets, selection of Chief Ministers and State party leaders, and party finance.
- Winning elections has become the only role a party envisages for itself. The privileging of elections at the expense of other aspects of the democratic process implies that parties are inattentive to the need for constant organisational change and renewal.
- The opacity of political financing, necessitates 'unhindered top-down control' and 'absolute loyalty down the line'.As party funds are raised and controlled centrally, it weakens the State units and rank and file vis-à-vis the central leadership on a range of issues including

leadership selection and nominations for elections. It also discourages democratisation as this would limit their power to accumulate wealth or amass a fortune or promote personal power at the expense of public interest.

Fallout:
- In the absence of intra-party democracy and a well-defined process for the distribution of tickets to candidates before polls, political parties hand over tickets to 'winnable' candidates, leading to the presence of criminals in the Parliament.
- The lack of intra-party democracy has also contributed to the growing nepotism in political parties. For the MPs in the 15th Lok Sabha, there is a direct relationship between age and links to a political family.
- Leader-centric political parties are detrimental to the political system as it impedes the growth of broad-based non-sectarian parties.

Need of Intraparty democracy:
- It is the political parties that form the government, man the Parliament and run the governance of the country. It is therefore, necessary to introduce internal democracy, financial transparency and accountability in the working of the political parties. A political party which does not respect democratic principles in its internal working cannot be exposed to respect those principles in the governance of the country.
- It is the political parties whose governments deliver 'good governance' through bureaucracy and legislative mechanisms.
- Political parties play a central role in the functioning of India's vibrant democracy. Given their centrality, it is imperative that their functioning be subject to some regulation or public scrutiny.
- It is to ensure that the institution is truly free, fair and untainted as envisaged in our Constitution for a representative democracy.

Global example:
Evidence from other democracies shows a trend towards greater intraparty democracy, decentralisation and transparency within parties.
- In Germany parties are required to meet certain conditions in nominating their candidates to party posts. They have to be chosen by a direct secret vote at both constituency and federal levels.
- In the U.S., laws were enacted that required the use of secret ballots in intraparty elections.
- The British Labour Party, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, the Democratic Party in the U.S. and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada have all seen movements by party activists and by the rank and file to reduce the power of entrenched party elites.

Way forward:

- A number of committees set up to suggest electoral political reforms have recommended introduction of intra-party democracy mechanisms in recruitment of members and candidates; elections for important party posts such as secretary, treasurer and president; consultations with party members on deciding party agenda; fund raising and spending and providing opportunities for young politicians to climb hierarchy ranks.
- The 170th report of the Law Commission of India on reform of electoral laws, dedicated an entire chapter on the necessity of providing laws relating to internal democracy within parties. It states,
- The report from the National Commission for Review of Working of Constitution recommends that there should be a comprehensive legislation, regulating the registration and functioning of political parties or alliances of parties in India.

Conclusion:

It is imperative that political parties undertake party reforms and ensure intra-party democracy. This would not only attract the youth toward politics in India and thus new energy but also strengthen overall democracy.

Connecting the dots:

- Lack of inner party democracy and institutionalization is a serious issue with political parties in India. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.*

Improving the Income Tax department

In news: The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has highlighted several issues in the functioning of the Government and its various departments. One was CAG highlighting that the income tax department made 'exaggerated' demands on large companies which were refunded the following financial year, along with interest. This is not a new issue. It usually happens as over-zealous officers race to meet the stiff, and often unrealistic, targets set by the Government for tax collections. Assessees may be troubled by such unreasonable demands they have little choice but to comply.

Issues:

While such practices may have been acceptable in the past, they're out of tune with a modern economy that counts rankings in the ease of doing business as an important metric.

- Placing impromptu and unreasonable tax demands does not qualify for being investor-friendly and this is something that policymakers should factor into their operations.
- Tax collected and refunded along with interest puts a heavy burden on the Exchequer.
- The CAG also noted that there were irregularities in respect of corporation tax and income tax assessments cases over the years, with arithmetical errors in calculating income and corporate tax in nearly 500 cases.
- The CAG also pulled up the department for not adopting a uniform approach to deal with cases of fictitious donations or bogus purchases that are generally used to launder money. This caused a revenue loss to the government.

Way forward:

- The functioning of the income tax department needs to be streamlined. While revenue targets matter, going for broke to attain them, often at the cost of the assessee, is not acceptable in an economy which is striving to improve its ease of doing business rankings.
- The Income Tax Act needs to be simplified and the element of discretion available currently to assessing officers, plugged. The governments have often held forth on simplification of tax laws, including doing away with exemptions and deductions. Yet, it has remained a work in progress.

Conclusion:

Simple tax laws and an improved Income tax department may not only help score points in ease of doing business rankings but also lead to lesser disputes with assesses and, arguably, even to buoyant revenues.

Connecting the dots:

- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has highlighted several issues related to the Income tax department. What are these issues? Discuss the necessity of reform required in IT department.

ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

TOPIC
General studies IV:
- *Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration*
- *Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions.*
- *Strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance.*
- *Probity in Governance: Concept of public service; Philosophical basis of governance and probity.*

Codifying conflict of interest

Introduction:
There is a need for removing discretion and codifying the conflict of interest inherent in having senior bureaucrats assuming corporate roles post-resignation or retirement.

What is conflict of interest?
A conflict of interest (COI) is a situation in which a person or organization is involved in multiple interests, financial or otherwise, one of which could possibly corrupt the motivation or decision-making of that individual or organization.A conflict of interest exists if the circumstances are reasonably believed (on the basis of past experience and objective evidence) to create a risk that a decision may be unduly influenced by other, secondary interests, and not on whether a particular individual is actually influenced by a secondary interest.

Examples-
- The case of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. FSSAI is theoretically supposed to be independent in monitoring food safety and yet, until 2014, industry representatives were regularly appointed to scientific committees.
- The Sharada Prasad Committee constituted to review the functioning of sector skill councils (SSCs) had termed these councils a hotbed of crony capitalism because of conflict of interest.

Issue:
- India has an official policy, regulated by the Ministry of Personnel, whereby senior bureaucrats have to seek permission for commercial employment after their retirement. However, such grants of permission within cooling-off period depend primarily on government discretion, with no codified mechanism.

- Some bureaucrats seem to have meshed the virtues of public service with private profit in retirement. They expose themselves to a potential conflict of interest.
  At present, conflicts of interest that arise out of an MP's private interest are regulated by the Code of Conduct for Ministers; Code of Conduct for Members of the Rajya Sabha, Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and Handbook for Members. Both Houses have an Ethics Committee to oversee the ethical conduct of MPs. The similar is the case with civil servant and judiciary. But by and large, these ethical books have been ineffective so far.'

Example of Canada:

In Canada, ministers must follow the Conflict of Interest and Post-Employment Code that outline ethical standards and private and public interests.

- It prohibits use of information obtained officially for personal gain.
- All Members are barred from voting on matters in which they have pecuniary interest.
- There is a lobbyist registration system.
- Ministers cannot engage in an outside profession or actively in business.
- It restricts members from simultaneously holding certain posts.
- There are some post-tenure employment restrictions.

Way ahead:

Making disclosing conflict of interest mandatory:

We need legislation to make non-disclosure of a conflict of interest punishable.

- E.M.S. Natchiappan's private member's bill (**The Prevention and Management of Conflict of Interest Bill**, introduced in 2012), the legislation ought to cover all arms of governance, including the judiciary, the legislature and the executive. The Bill talks about setting up of an institution for prevention and management of conflict of interest.
- The recommendation of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Department of Personnel and Training, calling for early retirement if interested in post-retirement private service is established, needs to be implemented.
- Increasing the mandatory cooling period to five years so that no undue influence can be exerted by the retired bureaucrat.
- To solve the issue, it is important to understand the scale of the problem, determine the right legal mechanism to deter and work towards changing our lackadaisical cultural norms on conflict of interest.

Towards transparency:

A culture of transparency needs to be fostered.

- Bureaucrats, retired and current, should talk openly about their post-retirement plans. Public disclosure of their interests would clear the air, enabling their views to be given appropriate merit.
- An open, public data platform enlisting all post-retirement appointments of civil servants will increase transparency.

There is nothing wrong in letting experienced bureaucrats utilise their expertise in the private sector — if adequate rules are framed and followed that enable the elimination of any conflict of interest.

Conclusion:

As acknowledgement of conflict of interest exists in the corporate world, with significant oversight through consumer watchdogs, credit rating agencies and activist shareholders, the same should exist for governance. Conflicts should be codified in a stringent legal framework, making compromise of the public interest a serious crime. Cleaning up business interests, and strengthening a moral code over such conflicts is needed. Without such transformation, India's society, governance and its private sector will remain open for insider trading.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by the term 'conflict of interest'? There is a need to codify conflict of interest in regard to Indian governance system. Discuss.
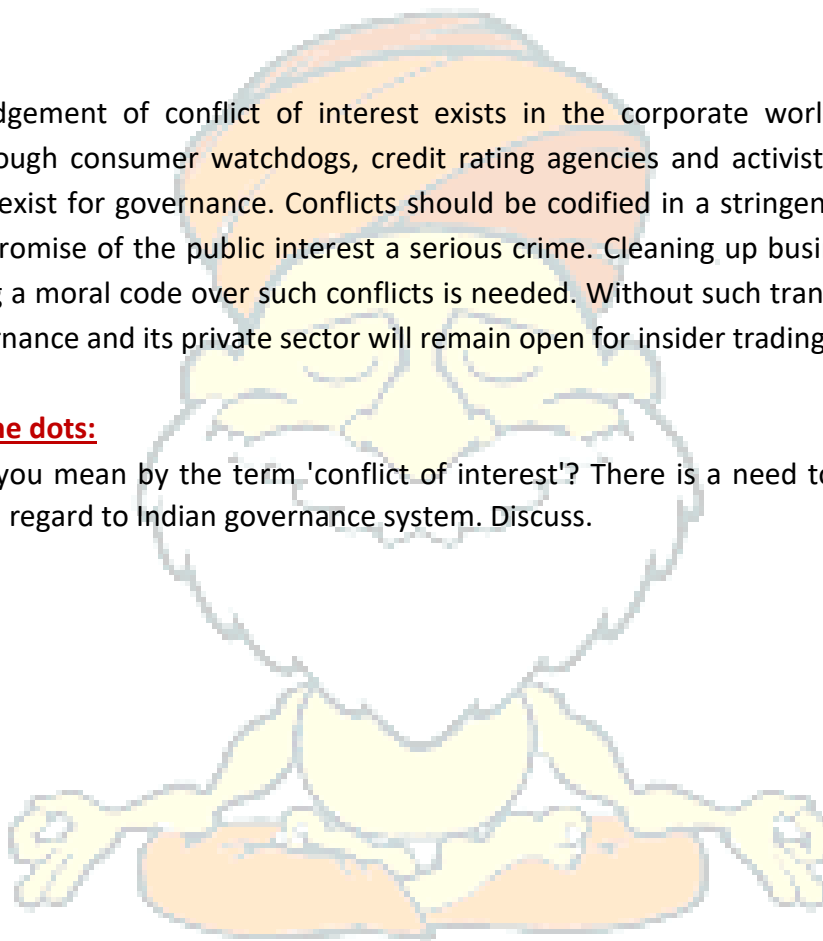
PRELIMS + MAINS FOCUS

Maldives and China enter into Free Trade Agreement

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- India and its nieghbours, India and the World, International relations; India-Maldives issue

Key pointers:

- Maldives is the only country in the neighbourhood which has not been visited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the last three-and-half years after he cancelled a proposed trip in March 2015 due to the turbulent political situation.
- Maldives and India do not have a Free Trade Agreement.
- This is Maldives's first FTA with any country, and China's second FTA with any country in South Asia — after Pakistan.
- Maldives transitioned from Least Developed Country (LDC) to Middle-Income Country status on 1st January 2011.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/new-delhi-caught-by-surprise-as-maldives-seals-fta-with-china-4962512/

Caste lines get blurred in cities: A myth

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Social or Dalit issues, Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Key pointers:

- The National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) latest data on atrocities against Dalits shows that urban areas tend to reflect the pattern in their surrounding rural belts.
- So, while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have always recorded the maximum crimes against Dalits, the NCRB data on caste-based atrocities in 19 metropolitan cities in 2016 — released for the first time — shows that Lucknow and Patna too top the list.
- A major chunk of crimes against Dalits involves the violation of women.
- Crimes against Dalits shows similarity between rural and urban spaces — and is partly against the theory of cities blurring caste lines.

WORST THREE

STATES

UP	10,426 (26%)
Bihar	5,701 (14%)
Rajasthan	5,134 (13%)

CITIES

Lucknow	262 (16%)
Patna	241 (15%)
Jaipur	219 (14%)

(Among 19 metropolitan cities)

Reason behind:

- Higher incidents of caste atrocities in cities could be because of greater awareness among urban Dalits about their rights, resulting in registration of more cases.

NCRB:

- While the NCRB has been gathering data on caste atrocities in metropolitan cities since 2014, this is the first time that it has released the figures.
- Since the data only records cases registered by the police, it may or may not reflect the actual ground situation.
- There is also no data available on the population of Dalits in cities, thus making it difficult to ascertain the proportion of caste atrocities (cases per one lakh population) in urban spaces.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ncrb-data-2016-most-atrocities-against-dalits-involve-crimes-against-women-most-cases-in-bengaluru-4962457/

President's visit to Mizoram

Part of: Mains GS Paper II – Development of NE; Inclusive development;

Key pointers:

- President terms the State 'special'; hails its Assembly as "role model for democracy"

- Mizoram's geography can be its biggest asset, and the government is working to ensure that.

- **Role model for democracy**- In its 45-year history, it (Assembly) has established a reputation for smooth conduct of business. The behaviour and participation of its members has conformed to the highest standards.

- The Mizo Accord of 1986 is held as a shining example all over the world- It ended an insurgency situation and a conflict that had divided India and Mizo society itself.

- Mizoram has achieved admirably in various human development indices such as literacy rate and sex ratio, but the infrastructural deficit remains acute.

Act East Policy and Mizoram:

- The President said the state is the focus of the Centre's Act East policy that aims at providing access to new markets for the State.

- The policy will give Mizoram's agricultural produce and traditional products entry to such markets, as well as strengthen information technology and Internet connectivity in the State.

- Once we the infrastructure is created, the process will have a multiplier effect across a range of industries.

Way ahead:

The way ahead is to enhance connectivity in all its dimensions — i-ways (information ways), highways, airways, railways and waterways; 'panch tatva '.
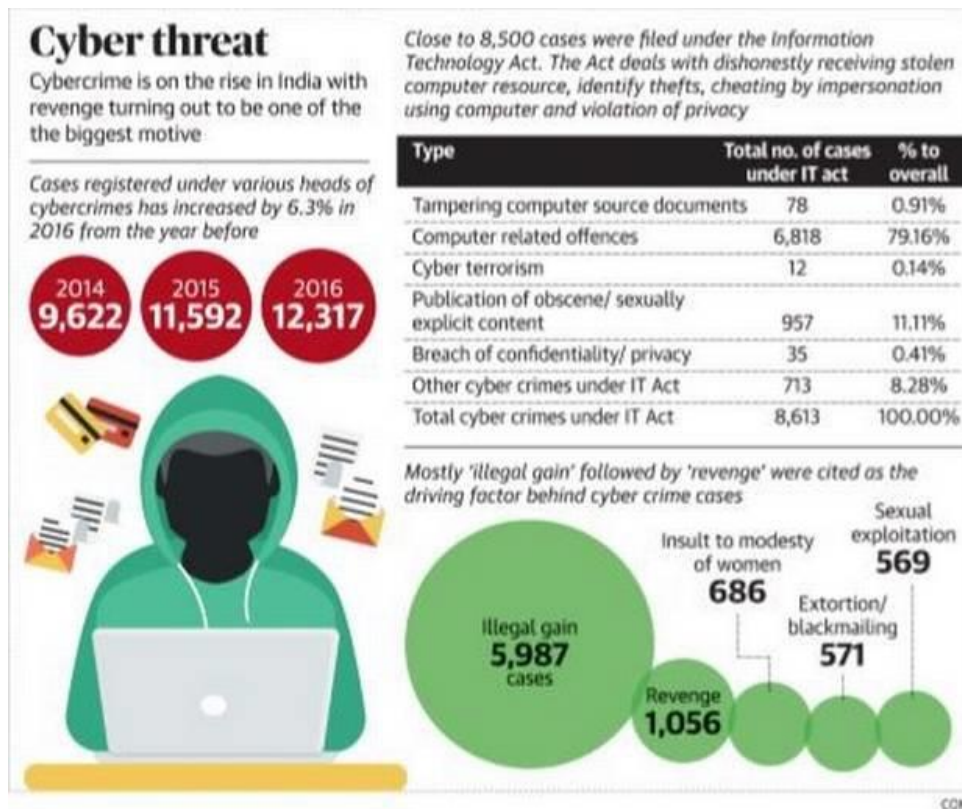
Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/mizoram-focus-of-centres-act-east-policy-kovind/article21238033.ece

Increasing Cybercrime

Part of: Mains GS Paper III – Security issues; Cyber Security

Key pointers:

- Charge sheets filed in only 30% cases reported in 2016, shows NCRB data

- More than 12,000 incidents of cybercrime were reported in 2016

- In 2016, 12,317 such incidents were reported and in 2015 the figure stood at 11,592, a jump of 6.3%.

Cyber threat

Cybercrime is on the rise in India with revenge turning out to be one of the the biggest motive

Cases registered under various heads of cybercrimes has increased by 6.3% in 2016 from the year before

2014 — 9,622
2015 — 11,592
2016 — 12,317

Close to 8,500 cases were filed under the Information Technology Act. The Act deals with dishonestly receiving stolen computer resource, identify thefts, cheating by impersonation using computer and violation of privacy

Type	Total no. of cases under IT act	% to overall
Tampering computer source documents	78	0.91%
Computer related offences	6,818	79.16%
Cyber terrorism	12	0.14%
Publication of obscene/ sexually explicit content	957	11.11%
Breach of confidentiality/ privacy	35	0.41%
Other cyber crimes under IT Act	713	8.28%
Total cyber crimes under IT Act	8,613	100.00%

Mostly 'illegal gain' followed by 'revenge' were cited as the driving factor behind cyber crime cases

Illegal gain 5,987 cases
Revenge 1,056
Insult to modesty of women 686
Sexual exploitation 569
Extortion/ blackmailing 571

- Illegal gain (5,987 incidents) and revenge (1,056) were the two top motives that accounted for cybercrimes. Sexual exploitation (686), insulting the modesty of women (569) and causing disrepute (448) constituted 13% of the crimes.
- Uttar Pradesh with 2,639 cases reported the highest number of incidents accounting for 21.4%, followed by Maharashtra with 2,380, Karnataka 1,101 and Rajasthan 941cases.

Crimes against State

- Tamil Nadu topped the list when it came to booking people for committing crimes against the State, which includes cases of sedition.
- Of the 6,986 cases registered in 2016, 1,827 or 26% cases were reported from Tamil Nadu, followed by U.P. 1,414, Haryana 1,286 and Assam 343 cases.
- While 35 cases of sedition were reported in 2016, there were 31 cases related to imputation and assertions prejudicial to national integration.

- Under the Official Secrets Act, 30 cases were reported and 922 cases were registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. In 2016, the police across India were investigating 12,637 cases of crimes against the State, of this 5,651 had been pending since 2015.
- Meghalaya with 42 cases registered the most number of cases under Sections pertaining to sedition and waging war against the country.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/many-cybercrime-cases-not-investigated/article21235628.ece

SC on Road Safety

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Social and Health issues; Role of Judiciary; Judicial Activism/Overreach?

Key pointers:

SC directions

- All States and Union Territories should frame a Road Safety Policy.
- Should set up lead agencies to work as secretariats of State Road Safety Councils to co-ordinate on activities such as licensing issues like driving licences, registration of vehicles, road safety and features of vehicles.
- made it mandatory for States and Union Territories to establish Road Safety Fund, the corpus of which would come from traffic fines collected. The money would be used to meet the expenses for road safety.
- The court has also directed framing Road Safety Action Plans by March 31 to reduce the number of road accidents, as well as the fatality rate.

Cause of concern:

- 90 per cent of the problem of deaths due to road accidents was the result of a lack of strict enforcement of safety rules on roads and strict punishment for those who do not obey rules.
- There was one death almost every three minutes due to road accidents. Only half the number of families of these victims were compensated.

Justice Radhakrishnan committee on road safety:

- Set up after the Supreme Court intervention.
- The Justice Radhakrishnan panel would fix the responsibility and functions of the State road safety councils.
- These councils would periodically review the laws and take appropriate remedial steps wherever necessary.

- Similarly, lead agencies and district road safety committees should be established by January 31, 2018.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-tightens-the-screw-on-road-safety/article21210650.ece

Draft law — Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Social empowerment

Key pointers:
- The Centre has drawn up a draft law which makes triple talaq a "cognizable and non-bailable" offence, punishable with three years jail and a monetary fine.
- It allows a woman who has been given instant triple talaq to move court, seeking "subsistence allowance" for herself and dependent children, as well as custody of minor children.
- The proposed law, which empowers Muslim women, applies to instant triple talaq in "oral, written, electronic or any other form".
- Any declaration of talaq-e-biddat by a Muslim man shall be "illegal and void", says the draft law.
- Marriage and divorce figure in the concurrent list. Still the Centre in view of the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission, consulted states.
- In a landmark verdict on August 22, the Supreme Court had "set aside" the centuries-old practice of instant triple talaq in which Muslim men divorce their wives by uttering talaq three times in quick succession.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/instant-triple-talaq-non-bailable-offence-3-years-jail-fine-for-guilty-says-draft-law-4964063/

National Nutrition Mission

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States

Key pointers:
- The Union government announced the launch of the National Nutrition Mission aimed at 10 crore beneficiaries, mainly children up to the age of 6 years, pregnant and lactating women, and adolescent girls.

- Half of the amount required for the scheme is proposed to come from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and other multilateral development agencies.
- The mission sets a target to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, and low birth weight by 2 per cent per annum, and anaemia by 3 per cent annually.
- It would be executed with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) as the nodal ministry along with Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare which is in-charge of immunisation.
- The mission aims to bring down the stunting percentage as per the National Family Health Survey-4 (2014-15) from 38.4 per cent to 25 per cent by 2022.
- ICT would be used for real time monitoring of the services provided by anganwadi workers, ASHA workers (accredited social health activists) and auxiliary nurse midwives.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/govt-launches-nutrition-mission-aimed-at-10-crore-beneficiaries-4964081/

1st Phase of Chabahar port launched

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations.

Key pointers:
- The first phase of Iran's Chabahar port, which holds significant strategic and economic importance for India, was launched recently.
- The overall development of the port is planned in four phases.
- India, Iran and Afghanistan have signed an agreement to grant preferential treatment and tariff reductions at Chabahar to Indian goods headed toward Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Significance of Chabahar port:
- The port allows India to bypass Pakistan and reach land-locked Afghanistan and Central Asian countries.
- New Delhi views the Chabahar port project as a strategic response to China's development of the Gwadar port in Pakistan, and its aggressive pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative.
- It is also key to accessing the Central Asian markets for Indian goods.
- Once the project is complete, Chabahar will be linked with the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC), which currently stretches from the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas in the Gulf to Russia, Eurasia and Europe.
- The port will increase the capacity of loading and unloading of ships as well as the employment rate in the province, according to an official with the Sistan and Baluchestan Ports and Maritime Organisation.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/irans-chabahar-port-opens-allows-india-to-bypass-pakistan-on-trade-route-to-afghanistan-4966219/

US withdraws from the New York declaration

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations.

Key pointers:
- New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants intends at protecting the rights of migrants. The declaration calls for a global compact on migration, and is expected to be adopted next year.
- Rationale given- staying in the agreement would be inconsistent with American immigration policy.
- The decision is consistent with efforts by the Donald Trump administration to limit incoming immigration and refugee settlement.

Article link: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/us-withdraws-united-nations-declaration-migrants-human-rights-trump-nikki-haley-a8089921.html

'Green Habitat' Concept

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Environment and ecology.

In **news:**
Amid concerns about unscientific construction practises, the Kerala government is considering promoting a 'green habitat' concept giving thrust to eco-friendly and reusable building materials, natural water storage and solid waste management.

The 'green habitat' concept:
- The buildings, under the concept, are planned to be designed in such a way that natural sunlight and wind is used to maximum and the usage of electricity reduces to the minimum.
- A rainwater harvesting or natural water storage system will be a feature of such 'green' buildings, where even kitchen and drainage water would be recycled and reused for other household purposes.

Need:
- The danger posed by unscientific construction practices.

- The scarcity of conventional building materials.

Article link: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/kerala-government-mulls-promotion-of-green-habitat-concept/articleshow/61902027.cms

Merger of scam-hit NSEL with FTIL

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Economy

In news:
The Bombay High Court verdict upheld the Ministry of Corporate Affairs' order directing the merger of scam-hit NSEL with Financial Technologies (India) Ltd (FTIL).

Background:
- In February 2016, the MCA had passed a final order directing the merger of scam-hit NSEL with FTIL.
- It was the first case of the government ordering the merger of two private sector companies (under Section 396 of Companies Act, 1956).
- Rs. 5,574-crore payment crisis had erupted at NSEL.
- A merger of NSEL with FTIL would result in the latter assuming all the liabilities of the scam-hit spot exchange, which is now a subsidiary of FTIL.

Negative implications:
- The order would have a serious impact on the limited liability concept by lifting the corporate veil by an executive order and without running a full evidence-led adjudication.
- Even in the case of consensual merger of two government companies, the principle of natural justice, constitutional validity and stakeholder voting (which are shareholders, creditors and employees) are taken into account. In this case, where two private companies are involved, the rule book and shareholder compensation has been ignored.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/nselftil-merger-upheld/article9981969.ece

Agreement on IUU fishing and overfished stocks: At WTO

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Key pointers:

- India will not agree to a commitment against subsidies for illegal, unregulated, unaccounted (IUU) fishing and overfished stocks at the WTO Ministerial meet to be held in Buenos Aires in December.
- New Delhi's firm stand on the matter is important as the livelihood of millions of artisanal farmers will be at risk if subsidy reduction commitments are undertaken without safeguards.

Global stand:

- Countries including Malaysia, Cameroon, Oman, Paraguay and the Philippines, too, have spoken out against commitments to reduce subsidies at the Ministerial meet while others such as the EU and New Zealand want their inclusion.
- The Africa Group has expressed its willingness to go along with commitments on disciplining fisheries subsidies as long as developing and less developed countries are exempt.
- China said it can support subsidy prohibitions but only for IUU fishing and not for overfished stocks.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/wto-india-not-yet-ready-to-commit-to-ending-sops-for-unregulated-fishing/article9982002.ece

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister on a visit to South Korea

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Federalism, International relations

Key pointers:

- The Andhra Pradesh Economic Development Board (EDB) entered into a letter of intent (LoI) with a group of 37 South Korean companies.
- The CM appealed to the Korean companies to draw inspiration from Kia Motors and come forward to invest in the State.
- The group has shown interest in investing ₹ 3,000 crore in A.P. and providing employment to 7,171 people.

Benefits for MNCs in A.P.

- The government has provided many facilities and has created the ecosystem for growth of industry.
- Proximity to Bangalore airport and Krishnapatnam port.
- Infrastructure is in place.
- There are no law and order problems.

- Neither there is labour unrest.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/naidu-begins-3-day-s-korea-visit/article21262456.ece

SC directs centre to repeal laws that discriminate against leprosy patients

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Key pointers:
- Centre told to respond in eight weeks to a call to repeal 119 laws that discriminate against leprosy patients.

- Twenty-first century society cannot justify shunning persons affected by leprosy or keeping them hidden in homes and away from the mainstream.

- The court asked the Centre to respond in eight weeks to a call to repeal 119 Central and State laws in practice since the 1950s that discriminate against leprosy patients, stigmatise and isolate them despite the fact that modern medicine completely cures the disease.

- Statutory laws continue to recognise superstitions that leprosy is "infectious and has something to do with genetics".

How laws discriminate against leprosy patients?
- Cause stigmatisation and indignity to persons affected by leprosy.
- Isolate/segregate persons affected by leprosy.
- Deny them access to public services.
- Impose disqualifications on them under personal laws.
- Bar them from occupying or standing for public posts or office.

These laws rob persons affected by leprosy by denying them equal treatment under personal laws, in matters of employment and appointment or election to public office, as well as access to and free movement in public places.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/21st-century-india-cannot-shun-leprosy-patients-says-supreme-court/article21259885.ece

India-Japan JWG on nuclear deal

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:
- India and Japan will soon form a joint working group (JWG) that will identify the location, create joint ventures and establish a roadmap for building nuclear reactors in the country.
- The JWG will comprise representatives from both private and public sectors of both countries.
- The liability issue still remains a major concern with the Japanese. One of the main objectives of the JWG will be to find a way to address this issue by working jointly with the Indian government.

Indo-Japan nuclear deal:
- The nuclear deal, which culminated six years of negotiation, was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tokyo in November last year; it came into force in July 2017 after the Japanese Diet ratified it.
- Under this deal, India will be the first country that is not a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to obtain Japanese nuclear technology.
- Once implemented, the deal is expected to pave the way for smoother nuclear trade — not only in terms of nuclear technology but also nuclear material and nuclear equipment.
- This will also enable both sides to expedite negotiations for concluding the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/india-japan-to-form-working-group-on-civil-nuke-deal/article9984852.ece

Rape of minors to attract death in M.P.

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Social issues

Crime central

Total rape cases in India (2016)	38,947
Madhya Pradesh	4,882
Uttar Pradesh	4,816
Maharashtra	4,189

Charges framed under POCSO Act

Total cases	36,022
Uttar Pradesh	4,954
Maharashtra	4,815
Madhya Pradesh	4,717

Source: NCRB

Key pointers:

- The Madhya Pradesh Assembly unanimously passed a Bill awarding death to those found guilty of raping girls aged 12 and below.
- With this, Madhya Pradesh becomes the first State where those convicted of such rapes will face the gallows.
- The Bill will now be sent to the President for his assent, after which it will become a law.
- All parties supported the Bill in Assembly.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/rape-of-minors-to-get-death-in-mp/article21263073.ece

Retreating Globalisation: U.S.

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- The U.S. Supreme Court allowed the Trump administration to fully enforce its revised ban on people from eight nations from travelling to the country.

- President Donald Trump's decision has been challenged on questions such as his legal authority to issue such an order and whether it constitutes a religious test and a Muslim ban, as promised by Mr. Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign.
- The Trump administration has argued before the courts that the travel ban is for national security.
- Six of the eight countries barred by the order are majority-Muslim — Syria, Libya, Iran, Yemen, Chad and Somalia. North Korea and Venezuela are the other two.
- Restrictions on travel by people from these eight countries vary in their details.
- Recently, President had also withdrew U.S. from the UN's Global Compact on Migration.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/supreme-court-allows-full-enforcement-of-trump-travel-ban/article21264240.ece

UAE and Saudi Arabia forms a different group

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:
- The UAE on Tuesday and Saudi Arabia have formed a new economic and partnership group separate from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
- The move that can undermine the regional bloc amid a diplomatic crisis with Qatar.
- The new committee has been assigned to cooperate and coordinate between the UAE and Saudi Arabia in all military, political, economic, trade and cultural fields, as well as others, in the interest of the two countries.
- The UAE and Saudi Arabia have cultivated even-closer ties in recent years.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/uae-and-saudi-form-new-group-separate-from-gcc/article21268680.ece

Change in definition of 'employment'

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Inclusive growth

A question of jobs

Current definitions for 'formal' workers exclude those with steady jobs but who either do not work in large firms or have no written contracts, says the Task Force

Jobs created
2009: 8.89 lakh
2014: 4.21 lakh
2015: 1.35 lakh
2016: 2.31 lakh

Between October 2016-January 2017:
1.22 lakh jobs created in the formal sector

83,000 jobs in manufacturing alone

1.5 lakh casual workers lost jobs

SOURCE: LABOUR BUREAU

Need of changing the definition:

- The government's data show that job creation in past three years in the formal sector was slowest in almost a decade
- It is felt the ground reality on jobs was not being 'properly' captured as the existing system takes into account only the formal sector.
- There is no fixed definition of formal workers currently in India.

The 'Task Force on Improving Employment Data':

- The task force was set up in May 2017 under the chairmanship of Mr. Arvind Panagariya.
- The panel's terms of reference included assessing the existing data systems and sources that provide information on jobs and job creation and then identifying alternate sources that could provide such data.
- The terms also included recommending mechanisms for capturing information on jobs and job creation on a regular basis for both the informal and formal sectors.
- All the economic activity in India, including in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) and informal sectors, will get properly captured.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/change-in-definition-of-employment-coming/article21261322.ece

The 'Dr Ambedkar scheme for social Integration through inter caste marriage'

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Social issues

Key pointers:

- The scheme was started in 2013, with a target to provide monetary incentive to at least 500 inter-caste couples, where either the bride or the bridegroom is a Dalit, per year.
- This was meant to "appreciate the socially bold step" and to enable them to "settle down in the initial phase of their married life".
- The scheme's stated purpose was to counter the Hindu practice of marrying on the "traditional grounds of jatis (castes) and up-jatis (sub-castes)".
- The idea is derived from the teachings of Babasaheb Ambedkar, who said that caste and endogamy (custom of marrying within one's own community) are the same thing. He had noted that, "prohibition, or rather the absence of intermarriage is the only one that can be called the essence of caste" and advocated "fusion" through intermarriage (exogamy).
- The target for each state is fixed in proportion to its share of Scheduled Caste population, though states are allow to exceed their targets.
- In a recent order, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment directed that "the condition that the total income of the newly-wedded couple will not exceed Rs 5 lakh per annum" be scrapped.
- Issue- Awareness about the scheme is very low, most of the proposals come from a few states such as Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/centre-offers-rs-2-5-lakh-for-every-inter-caste-marriage-with-a-dalit-4969989/

Boost to Exports sector

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Trade & Infrastructure

Background:
With exports of goods lower than $300 billion in the last two years, the government is under pressure to give the sector a major boost. Exports in 2016-17 were $276.54 billion, compared with $314.14 billion in 2013-14.

Key pointers:

- The government recently announced incentives totalling Rs 8,450 crore to help boost exports.
- The incentive rate has been raised by 2 per cent under the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) and Services Exports from India Scheme (SEIS).

- The additional incentives have been provided for exports by small and medium enterprises, labour-intensive and agriculture-based exports among others.
- The mid-term review of the five-year FTP aims to promote exports by simplification of processes, enhancing support to high employment sectors, leveraging benefits of GST, promoting services exports and monitoring exports performance through state-of-the-art analytics.
- The government has set up a "state-of-the-art" trade analytics division set up in DGFT for data based policy actions, which will improve policy making process and making it a dynamic and evidence driven.
- Self-certification scheme for duty free imports.
- A single point electronic contact to traders with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade for trade and consignment related queries.
- Creation of a logistics division in the department of commerce.
- The government is also working on Ease of Trading rules to make processes simpler for exporters and importers.
- An e-wallet system to address the liquidity problem being faced by exporters is likely to be operational from April 1, 2018.

MEIS:

- Under the MEIS scheme available to exporters, identified sectors are given duty exemption scrips, which are fixed at a certain percentage of the total value of their exports. These scrips can be used to pay duties on inputs and can be traded.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/higher-export-relief-for-labourintensive-sectors/article9983417.ece

Google's outreach to India

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:

- Google is all set to extend its free Wi-Fi services beyond railway stations to include entire cities as part of the company's Next Billion User initiative.
- Google has already connected 227 railway stations in India through Google Stations to provide high speed connectivity. Google last year announced that it will be connecting 400 railway stations with high speed internet connectivity in partnership with the Indian Railways and its telecom arm Railtel.

- Pune will be the first smart city to receive free connectivity across the city from Google Stations initiative.
- While Google maintains that it does not plan to monetise Google Stations, it is testing out advertising and possibly paid upgrades to create a sustainable model for Google Stations.
- Similar to Google, Facebook has also been offering Wi-Fi services in several villages across the country. However, in order to make the initiative sustainable, the company charges users small fee such as Rs. 10 a day for 300Mb usage through its Express Wi-Fi initiative.

Other initiatives by Google:
- Google has also announced that Google Assistant, the company personalised artificial intelligence-based assistance will be supported on the Reliance Jio Phone, including voice command in multiple Indian regional languages.
- The search engine giant also introduced a new Two-Wheeler Mode in Google Maps, which will offer navigation especially for two-wheeler riders. Two-wheeler mode has been launched in India initially and will be offered in other countries subsequently.
- The search giant also announced the availability of a special version of Android, the Android Oreo (Go edition), which will make entry-level smartphones.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-info-tech/google-set-to-offer-free-wifi-in-smart-cities/article9983420.ece

NGT ruling on AoL's festival on Yamuna floodplains

Part of: Mains G.S. Paper III- Environment and Ecology

Key pointers:
- Sri Sri Ravishankar's Art of Living Foundation (AoL) is "responsible" for "causing damage and environmental degradation" to the Yamuna floodplains due to its three-day World Culture Festival (WCF) held in March 2016, the National Green Tribunal said recently.
- The tribunal had earlier levied Rs 5 crore as environment compensation on AoL.
- Earlier this year, an NGT-appointed expert committee had noted that the rehabilitation of the floodplains would cost over Rs 42.02 crore and may take up to ten years.
- The tribunal said that AoL was responsible for "restoration and restitution of the flood plain limited to portion that was allotted" to it for the festival "in the original condition in which it was allotted to it prior to the event".
- The judgment noted that the WCF had caused "serious pollution on the floodplain of the river" as nearly 35 lakh people had gathered at the site.

- The activities have led to "change in topography and habitat diversity, loss of waterbodies and wetlands, loss of floodplain vegetation and biodiversity, changes in substrata – nature of soil, consolidation and compaction, toxic substances and degradation and loss of ecosystem functions".

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/ngt-holds-sri-sri-ravishankars-aol-responsible-for-yamuna-floodplains-damage-4972339/

Polluters Pays Principle

Part of: Mains G.S. Paper III- Environment and Ecology

Key pointers:
- The "Polluter Pays Principle" is now almost universally acknowledged in environmental jurisprudence.
- According to this, those who pollute the environment must be made to pay not just for the costs of remedial action, but also for compensating victims of environmental damage.

Background:
- Some trace the Polluter Pays Principle's origin to the Stockholm Declaration made at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in June 1972, where Prime Minister Indira Gandhi drew a link between environmental pollution and poverty. The Stockholm Declaration asked signatory countries to develop international laws "regarding liability and compensation for the victims of pollution and other environmental damage".
- The Principle emerges more strongly in the 1987 report of the Brundtland Commission, called Our Common Future. The Brundtland Commission, or the World Commission on Environment and Development, was established in 1983 to examine environmental issues resulting from rapid industrialisation. For the first time, "sustainable development" was defined. Alongside, the Polluter Pays Principle was emphasised.
- The 1987 report greatly influenced the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, which, for the first time, explicitly enshrined the Polluter Pays Principle.
- After Rio, the Polluter Pays Principle began to be applied explicitly in environmental jurisdictions.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/ngt-sri-sri-ravishankar-art-of-living-polluter-pays-principle-4973065/

Court overturns CIC verdict declaring Ministers as "public authorities"

Part of: Mains G.S. Paper II- Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Key pointers:
- The Delhi High Court has set aside the Central Information Commission order declaring Ministers as "public authorities" and answerable under the Right to Information law.
- Directions issued by the CIC are also wholly outside the scope of the matter before the CIC, the judge said.
- CIC in 2014 on the question whether the Minister or his office was a "public authority" under the RTI Act gave the Cabinet Secretary at the Centre and Chief Secretaries in the States two months to appoint public information officers for each Minister's office. Also, the CIC said each Minister should get a website of his/her own where information can be disclosed.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/ministers-not-under-rti-delhi-high-court/article21293826.ece

Khumb Mela: Listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO

Part of: Mains G.S. Paper I- Art & Culture

Key pointers:
- After 'yoga' and 'Nouroz', Kumbh Mela/ KumbhMela, the largest congregation of pilgrims on the planet, has been listed as an Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO.
- The Intergovernment Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage under UNESCO has inscribed 'Kumbh Mela' on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity during its 12th session held at Jeju, South Korea in December 2017.
- This inscription is the third in two years following the inscriptions of 'Yoga' and 'Norouz' on 1st December 2016.
- The Kumbh Mela is held in Haridwar, Allahabad, Ujjain and Nashik.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/unesco-names-kumbh-mela-intangible-cultural-heritage/article21291961.ece

India enters into Wassenaar Arrangement

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Key pointers:

- The Wassenaar Arrangement agreed to admit India as the 42nd member of the organisation.
- It aims to regulate trade and use of dual use technology.

Benefits for India:

- It will also boost New Delhi's chances of joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- India's membership is expected to facilitate high technology tie-ups with Indian industry.
- It will ease access to high-tech items for our defence and space programmes.

What is Wassenaar Arrangement?

A shot in the arm

Founded in 1996, the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) is an elite club of countries subscribing to arms export controls, similar to the NSG and the Missile Technology Control Regime

- Headquartered in Vienna, it has 42 members, the latest entrant being India. Barring China, all permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are its signatories

- Its goal is to "promote transparency and greater

responsibility in transfer of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies"

- Since it's not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, India will look to the WA membership to boost its credentials to enter NSG

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-gets-admission-into-wassenaar-arrangement/article21347560.ece

Section 497 of the IPC

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:

- Section 497 of the IPC treats only the man as the offender and the married woman as a victim.

- The Supreme Court recently said the provision of adultery, the Section 497 of the IPC, treats a married woman as her husband's "subordinate."

- The court admitted a petition to drop adultery as a criminal offence from the statute book.

- "Time has come when the society must realise that a woman is equal to a man in every respect," the Supreme Court recorded.

- Terming the provision "quite archaic," the court observed in the order that when society progresses, rights are conformed and a new generation of thoughts should spring forth.

- The apex court had earlier on three separate occasions, in 1954, 1985 and 1988, upheld the constitutionality of Section 497.

Section 497 of IPC:
Section 497 of the IPC mandates that "Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery and shall be punished."

Two issues:
- Why does Section 497 treat the man as the adulterer and the married woman as a victim.
- The offence of adultery ceases the moment it is established that the husband connived or consented to the adulterous act. So, is a married woman the "property" of her husband or a passive object without a mind of her own?

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-agrees-to-examine-adultery-provision-in-ipc/article21296775.ece

China-Maldives strengthening ties

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Key pointers:

- The Maldives on Friday signed a crucial free trade deal with China, while endorsing its Maritime Silk Road project shunned by India for its strategic implications in the Indian Ocean.
- China deems the Maldives as an important partner to building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR).
- The China-backed multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) — of which the MSR is a part — is similar to Maldives' strategy of achieving economic progress by making use of its geographic advantages.
- President Yameen said the Maldives viewed China as "among our closest friends, most trusted and most dependable partners".
- After acquiring Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on a 99-year lease in a $1.1 billion debt swap deal, China has now roped in the Indian Ocean archipelago nation, located strategically in India's backyard, to implement the MSR.
- China has also set up a 'logistics base' for its navy in Djibouti, also located in the Indian Ocean region in the Horn of Africa.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/maldives-signs-trade-pact-with-china/article21341383.ece

New standard by FSSAI

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 Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has asked safety commissioners to take cognisance of the new standards framed for various food products.
- It has advised them to withdraw or not pursue cases of violation of old norms and standards, unless companies are still not compliant with the new or revised standards.

New standards
The FSSAI, through its Friday order, said that

- During the last few years a large number of new standards have been framed or amended for several food products based on scientific evidence to ensure appropriate food safety levels.

- Such revision of standards has taken place after talking into account all scientific evidence required to ensure appropriate level of protection of human life and health.
- Standards are continuously evolving based on the views of the scientific panels.
- Field machinery needs to be focussed on genuine cases of unsafe food products. This will help reduce the burden of litigation.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/focus-on-compliance-with-new-norms-fssai/article9987442.ece

Special & Differential Treatment for India

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Key pointers:
- India's continued eligibility for special and differential treatment (S&DT) at the World Trade Organization (WTO) hangs in the balance. There is no clarity over whether India will continue to be covered under the S&DT provision being reviewed at the WTO.
- Benefits of S&DT provisions includes— imposition of lower liberalisation commitments on developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) compared to developed countries in many areas.
- India is trying to push for its continuation, but many members are not so eager. There are a number of LDC members that feel that large developing countries such as India and China should not get S&DT. This actually goes against the mandate of the Doha Development Round, which extends it to all developing countries.
- The G-90 group, including LDCs, the African group and the ACP (African, Caribbean, Pacific), in a recent draft proposal, laid down that while LDCs shall be free to introduce and maintain investment measures that deviate from their obligations under the TRIMs (Trade Related Investment Measures) Agreement, developing countries can deviate only temporarily to meet specific objectives such as increasing industrialisation, export capacity or modernisation. The paper talks about S&DT not for all developing countries but for some with capacity constraints," the official said.
- The Ministerial Conference 11 (MC 11), which is from December 10-13, is working on five specific areas including agriculture, services, e-commerce, development and fisheries.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/as-wto-meet-begins-india-fights-to-maintain-developing-country-status/article9988452.ece

Engineering graduates: Lacking skills and employability

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Inclusive growth

Key pointers:
- An estimated 8 lakh BE/BTech engineering students graduated in 2015-16, a little over a quarter of those who finished Class 12 Science that year. And yet, over 50 per cent of seats are going empty amid abandoned lecture halls and ghost campuses.
- According to a 2011 survey by Nasscom, only 17.5 per cent engineering graduates were deemed employable.

The issue:
- The problem of underemployment or lack of employability has often been attributed to an outdated syllabus that's not in sync with the industry and undergraduates training on obsolete equipment.
AICTE has a model curriculum, revised every five years, that affiliated universities use as a base to prepare their own syllabus, but most colleges follow decades-old programmes.
- Our demographic dividend can be realised only if there is adequate capacity building of people. If that's not happening, the same dividend can turn into a nightmare

Positive steps taken:
- The AICTE is going to decide that the curriculum will be revised once a year.
- The AICTE has set up a committee of experts, including IIT professors, who have drafted the model engineering syllabus for first-year students.
- Improving the quality of education basic is one of the major requirements for Make in India to succeed.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/experts-sound-alarm-bells-dividend-can-be-nightmare-make-in-india-at-risk-4977253/

The Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance (FRDI) Bill 2017

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Economy

Key pointers:
- The FRDI Bill is part of a larger, more comprehensive approach by the Centre towards systematic resolution of all financial firms — banks, insurance companies and other financial intermediaries.

- The Bill comes together with the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code to spell out the procedure for the revival of an ailing company.
- The need for a specific regulation rose following the 2008 financial crisis, which witnessed a large number of high-profile bankruptcies.

The Bill's main provisions:
- The Bill provides for the setting up of a Resolution Corporation — to replace the existing Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation — which will be tasked with monitoring financial firms, anticipating their risk of failure, taking corrective action and resolving them in case of failure.
- The corporation is also tasked with providing deposit insurance up to a certain limit yet to be specified, in the event of a bank failure.
- The Corporation will also be tasked with classifying financial firms on their risk of failure — low, moderate, material, imminent, or critical. It will take over the management of a company once it is deemed critical.

Concerns:
- The FRDI Bill also empowers the Corporation to bail-in the company.
- While a bail-out is the use of public funds to inject capital into an ailing company, a bail-in involves the use of depositors' funds to achieve those ends.
- This has caused a lot of concern among depositors who are worried they may lose their hard-earned money deposited with banks.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/what-does-the-frdi-bill-do-for-you/article21386264.ece

Solar storms and L1 point

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science and Technology? developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

What are solar storms?
- Solar storms are violent events on the sun which can temporarily distort the earth's magnetosphere – the region around the earth which is influenced by its magnetic field.
- These temporary disturbances, called geomagnetic storms, can generate shock waves in the interplanetary medium that can accelerate charged particles to very high energies and which, in turn, can harm the satellites placed by humans in space.

- Such solar storms have two causes: Coronal Mass Ejections (CME) and Corotating Interaction Regions (CIR).
- CMEs are huge explosions of charged particles extending beyond the sun's corona or outer layer and can be visibly observed.
- CIRs are generated in the interplanetary medium and there are no visual signatures for CIRs.
- Charged particles are being spewed continually out of the sun's corona, forming the solar wind.
- The sun goes through cyclic variations with a period of eleven years during which sunspot activity increases to a maximum and then decreases.

L1 point:
- There is an imaginary point on the line joining the sun and earth known as the L1 point or the Lagrange 1 point.
- A special feature of this point is that a particle placed there will feel no gravitational pull due to either the sun or the earth as the two forces cancel each other.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/workings-of-solar-wind-flows-deciphered-by-prl-team/article21380124.ece

NIC-CERT centre

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Cyber security issues

Key pointers:
- The NIC-CERT centre has been set up by the government. It would monitor and help in early detection and mitigation of cyberattacks on government networks.
- NIC-CERT currently has a team of about 30 cybersecurity professionals.
- NIC-CERT will operate in close co-ordination and collaboration with other sectoral CERTs and more so with CERT-In.
- The government had already announced setting up of sectoral CERTs (computer emergency response teams) for sectors such as finance and power.
- Using various tools, the team at NIC-CERT will be able to identify vulnerabilities and possible exploits and the intelligence gathered will give CERT the ability to predict and prevent attacks.

NIC:
- NIC's (National Informatics Centre) networks handle about 500 GB of data at any given point in time.

- All communications between government departments — Centre, State and district, as well as interactions between the government and the citizens takes place through NIC's network.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/govt-sets-up-nic-cert-centre-to-detect-prevent-cyberattacks/article21418593.ece

RIC meeting

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Regional groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Key pointers:
- The India-China-Russia trilateral, for the first time, called for cooperation to take decisive and concerted action against globally-proscribed terrorists and terror entities on Monday.
- Significant rise in acts of terrorism by terrorist organisations like Taliban, Daesh (Islamic State), al-Qaeda, and LeT directly undermine international peace and security, and endanger ongoing efforts to strengthen the global economy and ensure sustainable growth and development.
- A comprehensive policy for dealing with global terrorism is required. The policy should include dealing with extremism, countering religious fanaticism, preventing recruitment of terrorists, disrupting terrorist movements, stopping all sources for financing of terrorism, stopping the flow of FTFs (foreign terrorist fighters), dismantling terrorist infrastructure, and countering terrorist propaganda through the Internet, but we should not limit ourselves to these only.

Joint statements at RIC meeting:
- We call for the swift and effective implementation of existing international commitments on countering terrorism, including the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and targeted sanctions relating to terrorism and the FATF International Standards worldwide.
- We agree to strengthen cooperation to take decisive and concerted actions against globally proscribed terrorists and terror entities. We condemn all forms of terrorism and all terrorists, terror entities and organisations listed by the UN Security Council.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/sushma-swaraj-hafiz-saeed-let-india-china-russia-terrorism-mea-4978386/

Low-cost small satellite launcher by ISRO

**Part of:** Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:

- A low-cost small satellite launcher is being developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation.
- The launcher will be capable of putting 500-600 kg satellites in orbits close to the earth.
- The development cost will be kept low at a few crore as the new launcher's requirement of advanced electronics is considerably lower.
- It could also tremendously cut the launch fee that customers would have to pay. Which is what all space agencies aim at: low-cost access to space, as they call it.
- Today, it takes 300-plus engineers and about 40 days to assemble a PSLV. A small launcher that can be got up perhaps in three days by a small team would make a big difference in the market as well as to the launch provider.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/isro-developing-a-compact-launcher-for-small-satellites/article21420644.ece

Cash benefit for TB patients

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health
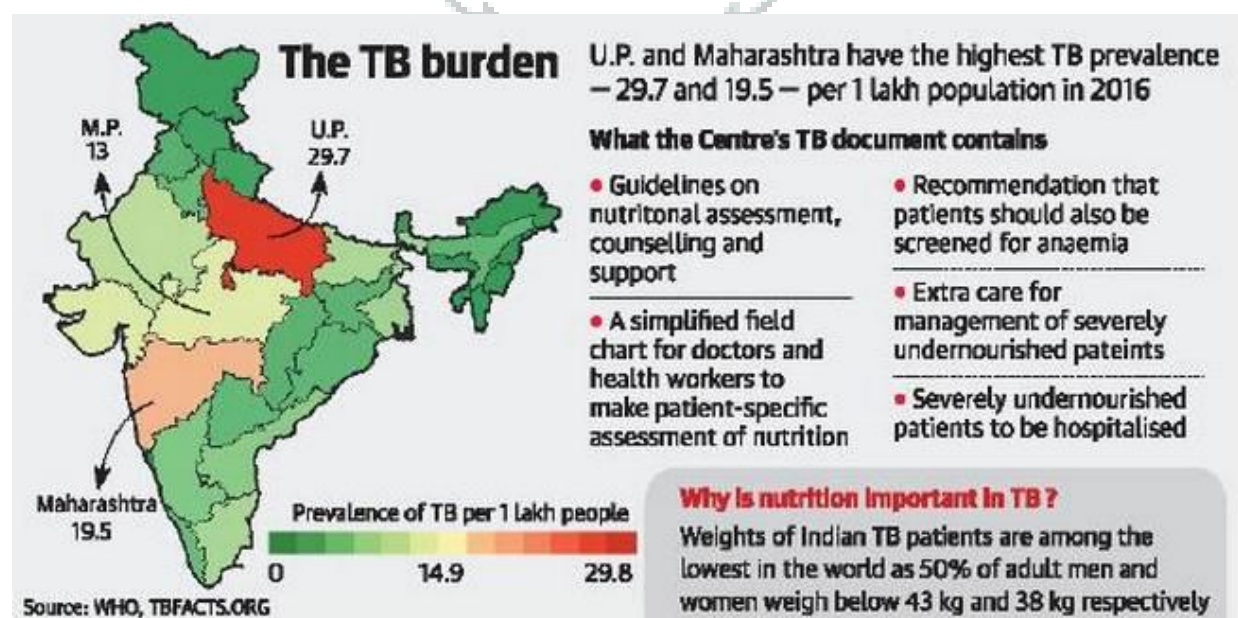
Key pointers:

- About 35 lakh identified Tuberculosis patients across the country will soon get Rs. 500 every month from the Centre as social support.
- The cash benefit for social support will cover loss of wages, travel and mainly nutrition.

Undernutrition and TB:

- TB is inextricably linked to determinants of health such as malnutrition and low immunity due to social deprivation and marginalization. Poor nutrition is increasing the risk by three-fold.
- Undernutrition at the population level contributes to an estimated over one million new cases of annual TB incidence in India.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/centre-to-give-rs-500-to-tb-patients-every-month/article21569540.ece

The "2+2" dialogue between India & Australia

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- Continuing with the strategic bilateral discussion, Australia and India discussed the need to maintain the Asia-Pacific region as a "free" and "open" zone under the "2+2" dialogue model which includes the foreign and defence secretaries of both sides.
- Both sides 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.
- There is a growing convergence of strategic perspectives between the two countries.
- Both sides call for the need to maintain the region as a 'free' and 'open' zone.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-australia-call-for-open-asia-pacific-zone/article21551158.ece

Special courts for criminal cases involving MPs and

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.

Key pointers:

- The Centre has informed the Supreme Court that it will set up at least 12 special courts to try exclusively criminal cases involving MPs and MLAs.
- The government, in an affidavit, said it had framed a scheme to set up the special courts.

Background:

- The affidavit was in response to a Supreme Court direction in November to the government to frame a Central scheme for setting up special courts across the country exclusively to try criminal cases involving "political persons".
- In a determined effort to cleanse politics of criminality and corruption, the court said it took years, probably decades, to complete the trial against a politician. By this time, he or she would have served as a Minister or legislator several times over.
- The scheme should give the details of the funds that are required to set up such courts.
- The Supreme Court would directly interact with the State governments on issues like the appointment of judicial officers, public prosecutors, court staff and other requirements of manpower and infrastructure for the special courts.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/special-courts-to-try-politicians-centre-informs-sc/article21540568.ece

India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit

Part of: Mains GS Paper 2- Global groupings affecting India's interests

Key pointers:

- Marking India's 25 years of partnership with the ASEAN, the Modi government seeks to augment its ties with the 10-member regional grouping in the coming year.
- An India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit that will be held on January 25.
- The theme of the summit, '**Shared Values, Common Destiny**'. It will have a special focus on 3 Cs – Commerce, Connectivity and Culture.
- Commerce- The most contentious part of the relationship, is bilateral trade between India and ASEAN. While the free trade agreement on goods have been in place since 2010, the pact on services trade have not yet been ratified by Philippines, Laos and Cambodia. It was signed in 2014. ASEAN is India's fourth largest trading partner. Bilateral trade between India and ASEAN reached $70 billion in 2016-17, up from $65 billion in 2015-16.
- Connectivity- With connectivity at its core, the summit will also seek to discuss the progress achieved so far in some of the crucial projects such as the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport corridor and India-Thailand Trilateral Highway. Efforts will be made to expedite

these   projects.
On the trilateral highway, efforts are being taken to complete the project by 2019 and then extending it to the CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) countries.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/indiaasean-partnership-set-to-get-a-shot-in-the-arm/article9992596.ece

Controlling organised crime: Uttar Pradesh

Part of: Mains GS Paper 2-

Key pointers:
- The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet recently cleared Control of Organised Crime Bill, 2017, it will allow the government to attach "illegal" property of those booked under it.
- Those found involved in extortion, kidnapping for ransom, illegal mining, manufacturing or sale of fake drugs, and encroachment or trespassing in an organised manner will come under the ambit of the proposed law.
- An Organised Crime Control Authority, chaired by the state's Principal Secretary (Home) at the state-level and district magistrate at the district-level, will monitor cases under the proposed law. This authority will also hear appeals against registering cases under it. Another appelate body, headed by a retired judge, will hear appeals against the authority's order, the Bill says.
- Once passed, those booked under it will be unable to get any government security.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/uttar-pradesh-yogi-adityanath-govt-clears-stringent-draft-bill-to-control-organised-crime-4981730/

Future of jobs in India

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Inclusive development

P a g e | 144

'BY 2022, 9% OF WORKFORCE WILL BE IN JOBS THAT DO NOT EXIST TODAY'

Indian job landscape is in transitionary phase, thanks to emerging technologies and by 2022, 9 % of the country's 600 million estimated workforce would be deployed in new jobs that do not even exist today, says FICCI-Nasscom & EY report

SLOWDOWN

There would be a job slowdown for the next two years as companies struggle to restructure their business models, and by 2022, the entire job landscape would undergo drastic change

EXISTENTIAL THREAT

21% of workforce in 2017 would face "existential threat"

37% would be deployed by 2022 in jobs that have radically changed skill sets 46-48 mn jobs expected by 2022 in organised manufacturing and services sector from the current 38 mn
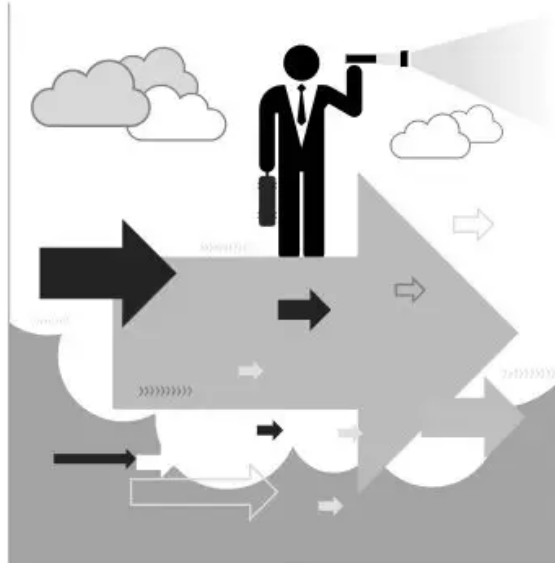
**20-25%** addition of all the new forms of employment to the 'organised' sector by 2022

This addition would increase the share of the organised sector in the overall economy to 10% from 8% at present, around 60 mn in a workforce of 600 mn

For the report, EY interacted with more than 130 business leaders, academicians and representatives of industry associations across sectors (IT-BPM, automotive, retail, textiles and apparel, BFSI) in India

Pic credits: Indian Express

Akshara Sagaram: Kerala literacy program

Part of: Mains GS Paper 2-
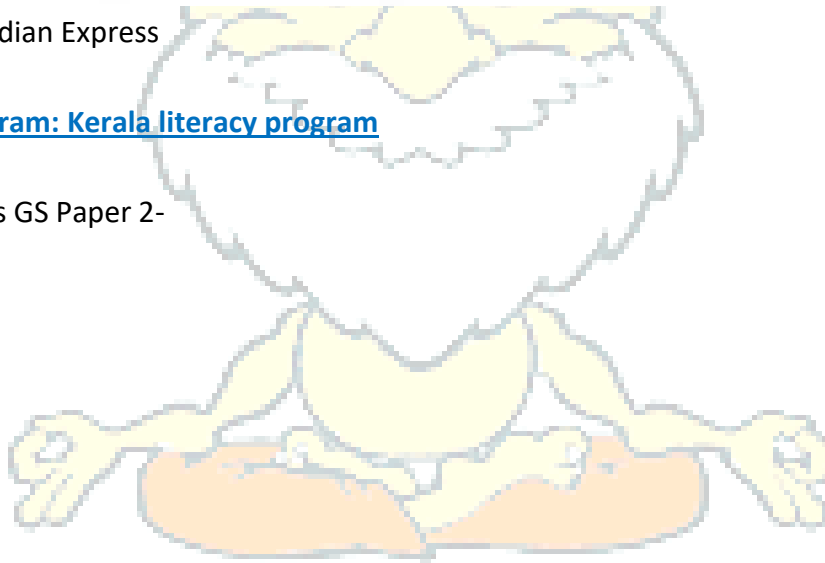
Learning goes places

Akshara Sagaram - Phase-II

Local bodies 36

Wards 234

The project is implemented with financial assistance from Fisheries dept

BENEFICIARIES
- Illiterate people
- Newly literate
- School dropouts
- Physically and mentally-challenged
- Fisher folks

INITIATIVES
- Improving living standards of coastal people
- Women empowerment
- Elimination of drug abuse
- Creation of awareness about environment, sanitation, cleanliness, and health

AREAS TO BE COVERED IN ERNAKULAM
Pallippuram, Kuzhuppilly, Kumbalanghi, Kumbalam, Chellanam, Kadamakkudy, Elankkunnapuzha, Kochi Corporation, Edavanakkad, Nayarambalam, Njarakkal, Kottuvalli, Varapuzha, Mulavukad, Udayamperoor

Pic credits: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article21617664.ece/alternates/FREE_300/KSLMA-to-roll-oGC631S9E91jpgjpg

Key pointers:
- Akshara Sagaram is an ambitious literacy programme for coastal areas. by rolling it out in three more districts, including Ernakulam.
- The project is being implemented by the Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority.
- Illiterate people, newly literate, school dropouts, physically and mentally-challenged people, and all fisherfolks who have not cleared fourth standard have been identified as potential beneficiaries.
- Improving the living standards of coastal people and coastal area protection measures, women empowerment, elimination of drug abuse, creating awareness about environment, sanitation, cleanliness, health, and various welfare programmes and services provided by the State government have been identified as the other immediate benefits of the project.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/coastal-literacy-project-to-be-rolled-out-in-3-more-districts/article21617665.ece

Special courts to deal criminal cases against MPs and MLAs

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.

Key pointers:
- The Supreme Court on Wednesday gave the green signal for the Centre's scheme to set up 12 fast track courts to exclusively prosecute and dispose of 1,581 criminal cases pending against Members of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies within a year.
- The Centre will allocate ₹7.8 crore to the States for setting up of the special courts.

Lens on lawmakers

Total number of cases against MPs & MLAs: 1,581

Budget allocated by the Centre to set up special courts: ₹7.8 crore

Courts expected to be operational by March 1, 2018

Petitioner asks SC: Can 12 special courts decide 1581 cases in one year?

These 12 courts are not the end of it. Let these courts start. It's easy to find fault, but difficult to start something

— RANJAN GOGOI, SC BENCH

Pic   credit:
http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article21665773.ece/alternates/FREE_615/lawmakerscol

- The scheme proposes to club the cases of several politicians together and have one court hear them. This way, the Bench expected a special court to finish at least 100 cases a year.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sc-clears-12-special-courts-to-try-cases-against-politicians/article21665775.ece

INS Kalvari

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

Key pointers:

- First of six scorpene-class diesel-electric vessels was recently commissioned into the Navy.

- This is the Navy's first modern conventional submarine in almost two decades since the INS Sindhushastra was procured from Russia in July 2000.

- Kalvari's induction in the Navy is a big step in defence preparedness," PM Modi said.

- The Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) has undertaken the project to construct the six submarines with technology transfer from the Naval Group (Formerly DCNS) of France.

- The Scorpene submarines can undertake different missions including anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying and area surveillance.

- The second of the Scorpenes would be- Khanderi and the third- Karanj.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kalvari-submarine-a-big-step-in-defence-preparedness-says-pm-modi/article21665640.ece

No consensus at WTO

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests

Key pointers:

- The December 10-13 meeting of the World Trade Organisation's highest decision-making body, ended with the WTO's 164 members unable to reach a consensus on substantive issues such as the food security right of developing countries and the centrality of development in multilateral trade negotiations.
- The member nations though committed to secure a deal by 2019 on banning certain forms of fisheries' subsidies.

Disagreements:

- The U.S. blocked the demands of more than a 100 developing nations, including India and China, to implement their food security programmes without onerous conditions.
- India thwarted attempts by several countries, both developed and developing, to initiate binding discussions on what they called **the 21st century challenges to trade** — including e-commerce, investment facilitation and proposed norms for small firms. India sticked to its position that members should first resolve **outstanding issues** (such as

food sovereignty) of the ongoing Doha Round negotiations that began in 2001 with a 'development agenda' (for improving the trading prospects of developing nations), before considering **'new issues'**.

- Since all major decisions in the WTO need to be taken by 'the membership as a whole', even a single country can end up being the deal-breaker.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/wto-meet-ends-without-consensus/article21665445.ece

World Inequality Report

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Inclusive growth

Key pointers:
- Income inequality in India rose rapidly since the 1980s to a situation where the top 10% of the earners accounted for 56% of the income earned in 2014, according to a new report by economists.
- The report, titled 'World Inequality Report,' said inequality rose substantially since the 1980s following the implementation of the deregulation reforms by the government.
- "In 2014, the share of national income captured by India's top 1% of earners was 22%, while the share of the top 10% of earners was around 56%," the report said.
- "The top 0.1% of earners has continued to capture more growth than all those in the bottom 50% combined."

Central focus:
- According to the authors, this rising inequality is in sharp contrast to the trends seen in the 30 years following Independence, when income inequality was widely reduced and the incomes of the bottom 50% grew at a faster rate than the national average.
- After independence, [the then Prime Minister] Jawaharlal Nehru implemented a set of socialist policies, with strict government control over the economy, with an explicit goal to limit the power of the elite," the report said. "The policies implemented by himself and his followers, including Indira Gandhi, up to the late 1970s, included nationalisations, strong market regulation and high tax progressivity." These measure, and others, the report said, had a significant impact on reducing income inequality.

The report:
- The report shows unequal impacts of globalisation over past 40 years.

- It aims to contribute to a more informed global democratic debate on economic inequality by bringing the most up-to-date and comprehensive data to the public discussion

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/income-share-of-top-1-surged-report/article21665296.ece

The National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Key pointers:
- The Union Cabinet Friday cleared the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill, ending the era of Medical Council of India (MCI) as the apex medical education regulator conducting annual inspections, and paving the way for an exit exam for medical graduates.
- According to the Bill, a 25-member commission selected by a search committee headed by the Union Cabinet Secretary will replace the elected MCI.
- The move is based on recommendations of the Ranjit Roychowdhury Committee and a Parliamentary standing committee — both concluded that a regulator elected by the fraternity it would monitor cannot be effective.
- The Bill also provides for the introduction of a licentiate (exit) examination within three years of its passage by Parliament. Such a move would make the medical sector the first in the country's higher education system to have a common entrance test (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test), counselling and exit examination.
- On the ground, the Bill represents a radical shift from the present system in which medical colleges are subject to annual inspections on physical, infrastructural and bed-patient norms.
  Under the NMC, which includes a Medical Advisory Council where states will be represented, colleges need permission only once for establishment and recognition. Apart from removing the need for annual renewal of recognition, colleges can, on their own, increase the number of seats subject to the present cap of 250, and start PG courses.
  The Medical Assessment and Rating Board constituted by the central government can, however, conduct inspections.
- Under the NMC Bill, if a college is found to be in violation of norms, such as those governing teachers, laboratories, patients, etc., it can be fined sums ranging from half of the cumulative fees it charges from students to 10 times that amount.

- The ex-officio members of the NMC will include the director of AIIMS, New Delhi; Director General of Health Services; and nominees of PGI Chandigarh, JIPMER Puducherry, TMCH Mumbai, and NEIGRIHMS Shillong.
- The 64-member medical advisory council will have one member from each state and UT (nominated by the Home Ministry); chairman UGC; director NAAC, etc.
- There will be four boards under the NMC for UG and PG medical education, ethics, ratings and assessment.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/education/new-regulator-for-medical-education-exit-tests-for-mbbs-4984888/

Social Audit law in Meghalaya

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- 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.

Key pointers:
- Meghalaya became the first state in India to operationalise a law - The Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act, 2017- that makes social audit of government programmes and schemes a part of government practice.
- The legislation will be applicable to 11 departments and 21 schemes.
- A social audit facilitator will be appointed to conduct the audit directly with the people. He will present findings to the Gram Sabha, who will add inputs and the result will finally go to the auditors.
- So far, social audits of government programmes have been done at the initiative of civil society organisations. These social audits had no official sanction.

Benefits:
- It will make it easier to correct course as the scheme is rolling along; the audit is not after all the money has been spent.
- It gives people a direct say in how money will be spent and fills an information gap for officers as they are directly in touch with the ground.
- The legislation provides a legal framework for allowing citizens' participation in the planning of development, selection of beneficiaries, concurrent monitoring of programmes, redress of grievances, and audit of works, services, and programmes on an annual basis.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/indias-first-social-audit-law-meghalaya-4984781/

Special package for leather and footwear sector

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Key pointers:
- The Union Cabinet gave nod to a Rs 2,600 crore special package for employment generation in the leather and footwear sector.
- The two sectors has the potential to generate 3.24 lakh jobs in three years and assist in the formalisation of 2 lakh jobs.
- The package involves implementation of central scheme 'Indian Footwear, Leather & Accessories Development Programme', with an expenditure of Rs 2,600 crore during 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The scheme would lead to development of infrastructure for the leather sector; address environmental concerns specific to the leather sector and facilitate additional investments, job creation and production.
- Moreover, the enhanced tax incentive would attract large-scale investments in the sector and reforms in labour laws in view of seasonal nature of the sector will support economies of scale.
- In a separate decision, the government also approved capital investment subsidy amounting to Rs 264.67 crore to four industrial units located in North-East, including Sikkim. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/business/cabinet-meet-govt-nod-to-2600-cr-fund-for-leather-footware-sector-4984988/

Tuirial Hydro Electric Power Project

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:
- A 60 MW Tuirial Hydro Electric Power Project (HEPP) has been constructed in Mizoram.
- It has been constructed as a Central Sector Project and implemented by North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO), under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power.

- This is the biggest power project located in Mizoram and will feed the entire energy to be generated to home State. The State's current power demand is 87 MW and this is being met by the mini power projects and Central sector projects.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/pm-to-dedicate-60-mw-tuitial-hydro-power-project-in-mizoram-to-the-nation/article9994663.ece

Fixed dose combination- Issue fixed by SC

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 Supreme Court in its verdict on fixed dose combination medicines paved the way for greater transparency in the approvals of these medicines.
- As per the SC's order the government can order a drug off the market shelf if it is found to be unsafe, without having the issue first examined by the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB).
- The government can take a product off the market if there are reports that it has been banned in other countries or there are reports within the country that the product was unsafe.
- The pharmaceutical industry that had stressed on the need for DTAB's evaluation before an FDC was banned.

FDC:
- A fixed dose combination (FDC) medicine involves more than one ingredient bundled into a product, and the market place has seen sometimes five to seven drugs being combined into a single product.

Background:
- Rampant introduction of irrational FDCs not only exposes the patients to unnecessary risk of adverse drug reactions but also creates health problem in larger groups of people. Most of these FDCs are available in India as over-the-counter products.
- In an attempt to address the issue, the Centre had the Kokate committee look into it. The panel had termed 963 FDCs "irrational", posing health threats. The government finally banned 344 FDCs last year. But with pharmaceutical companies arguing against the order, the case landed up at the Supreme Court.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/govt-now-gets-a-broom-to-sweep-out-irrational-medicine-combinations/article9995673.ece

Exercise Ekuverin

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- India and its neighbours

Key pointers:
- India and the Maldives carried out Exercise Ekuverin, their eighth annual joint military training event, in Belagavi, Maldives.
- The focus of the exercise is to acquaint both armies with each other's operating procedures in the backdrop of counter-insurgency/counter-terrorism operations in an urban or semi-urban environment under the U.N. charter.
- The exercise is aimed at enhancing interoperability between the two armies as the contingents hone their tactical and technical skills.
- Starting 2009, Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force have been holding Exercise Ekuverin, meaning 'friends' in the Maldivian language, in their countries on alternate years.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/exercise-ekuverin-in-belagavi-from-today/article21665847.ece

Making right to health a fundamental right

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Key pointers:
- A right to health under which people are entitled to avail health protection services free of cost should be in place on the lines of the right to education, according to a private member bill introduced in the Rajya Sabha.
- An amendment in the Constitution by introducing a new article 21 B for making right to health a fundamental right has been proposed.
- The state shall provide a system of health protection to all citizens, including prevention, treatment and control of diseases and access to essential medicines, the bill proposes.
- It states that all citizens should also have access to basic health services, emergency medical treatment and mental healthcare.
- The bill seeks to secure the above objectives with the state earmarking not less than 8 per cent of the annual financial statement for healthcare.

Central focus:

- The government expenditure on health is only 1.4 per cent of the GDP.
- The public health infrastructure is inadequate and unequally distributed.
- The Draft National Health Policy, 2015, takes note of the fact that over 63 million people are faced with poverty every year due to healthcare costs alone as there is no financial protection for the vast majority of healthcare needs.

Background:

- The right to health is also internationally recognised as a fundamental human right.
- It is also included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, of which India is a signatory.
- Private members bills can be introduced by any member of Parliament but have little possibility of getting the parliamentary nod.

Article link: http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/right-to-health-be-made-a-fundamental-right-private-member-bill-introduced-in-rs/story-pDGik64KN62ZC4q7bSlB7I.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

Mishap Prevention System in Railways

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- The Indian Railways has cleared a Rs 12,000-crore proposal to equip electric locomotives with the latest European train protection system.
- The system- European Train Control System (ETCS) Level-II will help drivers - or pilots -- to prevent rail mishaps.
- The ETCS Level-II system will be used on the entire 9,054 km-long Golden Quadrilateral route connecting the four metros to make it a fully accident-free corridor.
- Currently, the Railways has a basic automatic train protection system based on the ETCS Level-I specification to provide a back-up to loco pilots on a limited stretch.
- Disadvantage of the ETCS Level-I is overcome in ETCS Level-II, which ensures that the status of the signal ahead is continuously available in the loco through a wireless radio medium using a GSM-R (Global System for Mobile Communication-Railways) network.

Article link: http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/railway-nod-for-rs-12-000-cr-upgrade-of-mishap-prevention-system/story-

lpqOQVTTzpRl7pMjfFa7vL.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

Very high Out-of-pocket Expenditure on health impoverishing many

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Key pointers:
* Out of pocket medical expenses make up about 62% of all healthcare costs in India, as per Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI).
* This is extremely high and leads to impoverishment of patients.
* In comparison, out of pocket hospital expenses in developed countries such as the U.S. and the U.K. is 20% and in BRICS countries about 20-25%.
* There is a need to create health insurance products that were simple and intelligible to customers, provided coverage to the aged and infirm and those suffering from chronic ailments, brought down distribution costs, and ensured that there was no profiteering to the detriment of the insured.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/out-of-pocket-spend-makes-up-62-of-health-care-costs/article21860682.ece

India's growth rate projections

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indian Economy

Key pointers:
* The UN, in its latest report, projected India's growth rate to be 7.2 per cent in 2018 and 7.4 per cent in 2019.
* The annual 'World Economic Situation Prospects' report, released recentlys, said the GDP growth for India in 2017 is projected to be 6.7 per cent.
* India can achieve an eight per cent growth rate for the next two decades .

2017 has been a year of major economic reforms in India:
* There has been deregulation and further liberalisation of the policies regarding foreign direct investment.
* Demonetisation.
The policy reforms are positive, it now needs to be implemented effectively.

Next series of reforms should be:
- Promote investment.
- Improve the living condition of its population.

Article link: http://www.hindustantimes.com/business-news/india-can-see-8-growth-in-20-years-by-bettering-people-s-living-conditions-un-expert/story-BbpeaNSj0c1ojBhKk325KJ.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

Parliament gives nod to the IIM Bill

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:
- As per the IIM Bill, 2017, a Board of Governors will appoint the Director of each IIM.

- The Indian Institutes of Management got the power to grant degrees instead of post-graduate diplomas.

- The Bill also allows students to acquire doctoral degrees from the IIMs. Earlier, fellowships of the IIMs were not regarded as Ph.D.s, which led students to complete their diplomas and go abroad if they wanted to earn a doctoral degree.

- The hope is that the passage of this Bill will pave the way for more research at these prestigious institutions.

- The Bill also confers on the 20 IIMs the **status of institutions of national importance**, granting them greater functional autonomy by restricting the role of the government in them.
  Till now, the Centre had a role in the appointment of the chairpersons and directors to their Boards and also fixing the pay of the directors.
  As per the IIM Bill, 2017, a Board of Governors will appoint the Director of each IIM. A search-cum-selection-committee will recommend the names. And the director will be eligible for variable pay as determined by the Board.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/parliament-gives-nod-to-iim-bill/article21955766.ece

Methanol Economy Fund

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:
- Niti Aayog plans to set up a Methanol Economy Fund worth Rs 4,000-5,000 crore to promote production and use of the clean fuel.
- Using methanol as a transportation fuel would require minimal alteration in the vehicles. China is the world's largest producer of methanol.

Benefits of methanol as a fuel:
- Methanol fuel is cheaper, safer and pollution free.
- Methanol can be used as an energy producing fuel, transportation fuel and cooking fuel, cutting down India's oil import bill by an estimated 20 per cent over the next few years.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/business/business-others/niti-aayog-to-set-up-methanol-economy-fund-4990545/

Indirect tax collection more than direct tax collection

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indian Economy

Key pointers:
- The contribution of direct taxes in the total tax collection in 2016-17 has fallen below 50 per cent to 49.66 per cent for the first time since 2006-07.
- Data released by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) shows direct tax collection in 2016-17 was Rs 8.5 lakh crore. The indirect tax collection in 2016-17 was Rs 8.6 lakh crore.
- The reason for the fall primarily is slow growth in corporate profits in the last couple of years and a simultaneous increase in service tax collections during the last couple of years.

Issue:
- Indirect taxes are said to be regressive in nature as they do not distinguish between poor and rich, and therefore, higher proportion of indirect taxes in total tax collection is not considered ideal.

Article link: http://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/direct-taxes-collection-india-falls-50-percent-income-tax-department-cbdt/story/266384.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

$25 million development assistance for Rakhine State from India

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- India has announced a development assistance of $25 million for Myanmar's Rakhine State, from where thousands of Rohingya Muslims recently fled following incidents of violence against the community.
- The amount will be spent over a period of five years.
- The broad objective of it is to restore normalcy in the troubled state.
- An estimated 6,00,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled Myanmar's Rakhine State since late August after large-scale violence there.
- India and Myanmar Wednesday had inked an agreement on restoration of normalcy and development of the Rakhine State.
- The two countries signed a bilateral MoU on Rakhine State Development Programme. This MoU is the first government-to-government agreement signed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement of Myanmar with a cooperation partner focussed on socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-declares-usd-25-million-assistance-for-rakhine-state-rohingya-muslims-4993691/

National Rail and Transport University (NRTU) to be setup in Vadodara

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- The Cabinet has approved a project to set up India's National Rail and Transport University (NRTU) in Vadodara in Gujarat.
- A not-for-profit company under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013, will be created by the ministry of railways which shall be the managing company of the proposed university. The company will provide financial and infrastructural support to the university, and appoint Chancellor and Pro- Chancellor of the university.
- A Board of Management, comprising professionals and academics, shall be independent of the Managing Company with full autonomy to perform its academic and administrative responsibilities.
- The university plans to use latest pedagogy and technology applications such as satellite-based tracking, Radio Frequency Identification and Artificial Intelligence to improve on -the -job performance and productivity.
- The funding of the new University/ Institute is to entirely come from Ministry of Railways.

- In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that a railway university was needed for the research and modernisation of the country's archaic railway system in particular, and transport infrastructure in general. It was subsequently included in the Railway Budget in 2014.

Article link: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/transportation/railways/cabinet-approves-setting-up-of-indias-first-rail-university-in-gujarat/articleshow/62183361.cms

Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources

Key pointers:
- In order to ensure steady supply of skilled manpower in the labour-intensive textile sector, the Union Cabinet approved a Rs 1,300-crore outlay for skilling and up-skilling an estimated 10 lakh people in the entire value chain of the sector, including spinning and weaving.
- The 'Scheme for Capacity Building in Textile Sector' will provide demand-driven, placement-oriented skilling programme to incentivise the efforts of the industry in creating jobs in the organised textile and related sectors.
- Ten lakh people are expected to be skilled and certified through the scheme.
- The training courses will be compliant with National Skill Qualification Framework. The scheme will remain operational for three years ending in 2019-20.
- The scheme is aimed at promoting skilling and skill up-gradation in the traditional sectors through the Ministry of Textiles and providing livelihood to all sections of the society across the country.
- It will also be rolled out through reputed training institutions relevant to textile sector having placement tie- ups.
- Under the scheme, job role wise skilling targets will be based on skill gap identified for various levels including entry-level courses, up-skilling/re-skilling (supervisor, managerial training, advanced courses for adapting technology etc), recognition of prior learning.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/business/business-others/government-to-train-10-lakh-textile-workers-spend-rs-1300-crore-4992107/

National Highways Investment Promotion Cell (NHIPC)

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has created a National Highways Investment Promotion Cell (NHIPC).
- The primary focus of NHIPC will be to promote foreign and domestic investment in road infrastructure.
- The cell will focus on engaging with global institution investors, construction companies, developers and fund managers for building investor participation in road infrastructure projects.

Background:

- The government has set an ambitious target of construction of 35,000 km of national highways in the next five years involving an investment of Rs 5,35,000 crore under Bharatmala.

Article link: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/nhai-creates-national-highways-investment-promotion-cell/articleshow/62195570.cms

"SAMEEP": An outreach mission of MEA

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Important aspects of governance

Key pointers:

- SAMEEP, aims to take Indian foreign policy and its global engagements to students across the country.
- The ministry of external affairs has asked all its officers to engage students in the schools and colleges in the jobs that the ministry is engaged in, so as to give them a fair idea of how India engages with the world, what are its foreign policy priorities and how diplomacy is actually conducted.
- The programme is voluntary and gives officials the option of going back to their alma mater or to any school or college in their hometown.
- The ministry would give them a standardized presentation and officials would be free to improvise and add their personal experiences.
- The idea is not only to get the ordinary student to take an interest in India's place in the world and its global ambitions, but also to look at diplomacy as a career option.

Article link: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/mea-launches-sameep-to-take-indian-foreign-policy-to-students-across-the-country/articleshow/62139880.cms

LIGO-India

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:
- A new gravitational wave detector to measure ripples in the fabric of space and time is set to be built in India by 2025, in collaboration with universities from across the globe.
- The new Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) detector will add to the two already operational in the US.
- A third LIGO detector will help pinpoint the origin of the gravitational waves that are detected in future.
- The Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) Pune will run the detector.
- The LIGO India partnership is funded by the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) through its Newton-Bhabha project on LIGO. The Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology in Indore and Institute for Plasma Research in Ahmedabad are in charge of building various parts of the system.

IndIGO:
- IndIGO, the Indian Initiative in Gravitational-wave Observations, is an initiative to set up advanced experimental facilities, for a multi-institutional Indian national project in gravitational-wave astronomy.
- The IndIGO Consortium includes Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISER) and Delhi University, among others.
- Since 2009, the IndIGO Consortium has been involved in constructing the Indian road-map for Gravitational Wave Astronomy and a strategy towards Indian participation in realising the crucial gravitational-wave observatory in the Asia-Pacific region.

Gravitational waves:
- The existence of these waves were first predicted by Albert Einstein 100 years ago in his general theory of relativity.
- Massive accelerating objects - such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other - would disrupt space-time in such a way that 'waves' of distorted space would radiate from the source. These ripples travel at the speed of light through the universe, carrying with them information about their origins, as well as invaluable clues to the nature of gravity itself.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/a-new-ligo-gravitational-wave-detector-to-be-built-in-india-by-2025/article22149855.ece

Reservoir computing system

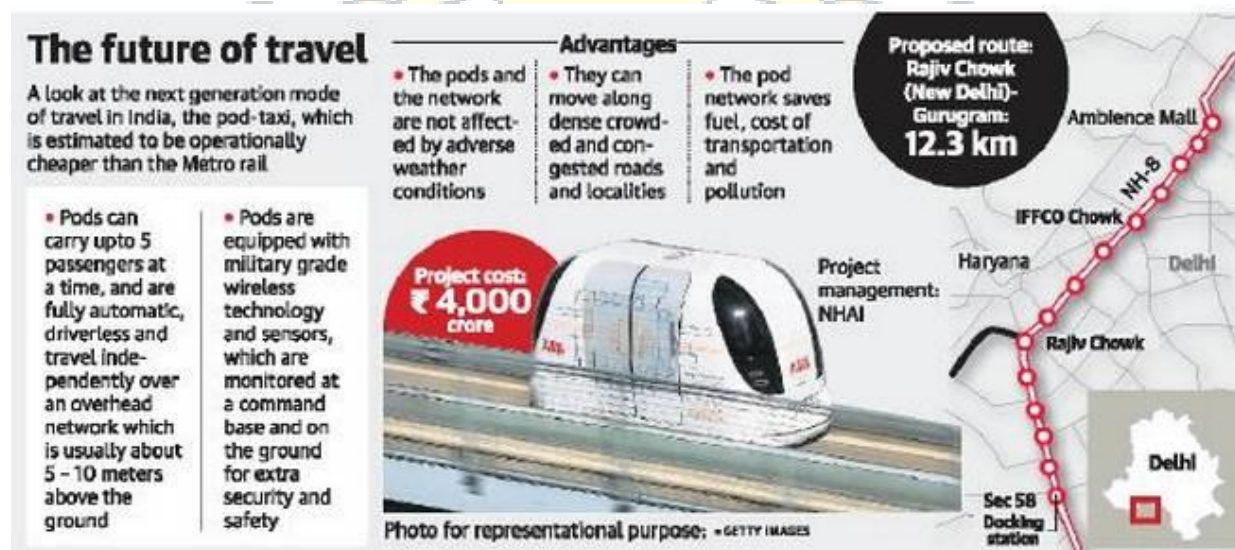**Part of:** Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:
- Scientists have developed a new type of neural network chip that can dramatically improve the efficiency of teaching machines to think like humans.
- The network, called a reservoir computing system, could predict words before they are said during conversation, and help predict future outcomes based on the present.
- Reservoir computing systems, which improve on a typical neural network's capacity and reduce the required training time, have been created in the past with larger optical components.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-life/system-helps-machines-think-just-like-humans/article22272500.ece

Personal Rapid Transit (PRT)

Key pointers:
- The projected ₹4,000-crore pod taxi scheme — also known as Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) — is a dream project of Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari.
- The NHAI has been mandated to execute it on Delhi-Gurgaon pilot corridor (12.3 km) from Delhi-Haryana border to Rajiv Chowk in Gurgaon on a PPP (public-private partnership) basis.
- PRT is an advanced public transport using automated electric pod cars to provide a taxi-like demand responsive feeder and shuttle services for small groups of travellers and is a green mode of uninterrupted journey.

The future of travel

A look at the next generation mode of travel in India, the pod-taxi, which is estimated to be operationally cheaper than the Metro rail

- Pods can carry upto 5 passengers at a time, and are fully automatic, driverless and travel independently over an overhead network which is usually about 5 – 10 meters above the ground
- Pods are equipped with military grade wireless technology and sensors, which are monitored at a command base and on the ground for extra security and safety

Advantages
- The pods and the network are not affected by adverse weather conditions
- They can move along dense crowded and congested roads and localities
- The pod network saves fuel, cost of transportation and pollution

Proposed route: Rajiv Chowk (New Delhi)- Gurugram: **12.3 km**

Ambience Mall — NH-8 — IFFCO Chowk — Haryana — Delhi — Rajiv Chowk — Sec 58 Docking station

Project cost: ₹ **4,000** crore

Project management: NHAI

Photo for representational purpose: •GETTY IMAGES

Pic   credit:
http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article22282384.ece/alternates/FREE_660/TH27New
%20Pod%20Taxicol

- The pilot project, to be taken up on design, build, finance, operate and transfer (DBFOT) basis, is meant for a 12.3-km stretch from Delhi-Haryana border.
- The model is in place in London's Heathrow airport, Morgantown and Masdar city.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/indias-1st-pod-taxi-on-the-way-to-follow-us-safety-norms/article22282385.ece

India to become 5th largest economy in 2018

Key pointers:
- India is set to overtake the United Kingdom and France to become the world's fifth largest economy next year, as per a report.
- Currently ranked seventh, India will move up to fifth place in 2018 and vault to third spot by 2032, the Centre for Economics and Business Research, a London-based consultancy, said in its annual rankings.
- "Despite temporary setbacks... India's economy has still caught up with that of France and the U.K. and in 2018 will have overtaken them both to become the world's fifth largest economy in dollar terms," said CEBR.
- Cheap energy and a digital revolution will drive economic growth globally, it said.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/business/india-to-become-fifth-largest-economy-in-2018/article22282335.ece

Rs 500 a month for TB patients

Key pointers:
- The Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) has approved an incentive of Rs 500 a month for all tuberculosis patients for the duration of the treatment, irrespective of their income level.
- The money is for nutrition support, as TB is known to be a disease of undernutrition.
- The incentive amount, though, is a fourth of what was envisaged in the National Strategic Plan for TB Elimination released earlier this year with the aim of eliminating the disease by 2030.
- "To address financial and nutritional hardship the patient and family undergoes due to TB and to reduce catastrophic cost to patient due to TB, cash incentive of Rs 2,000 will be

provided for every TB patient through Direct Benefit Transfer," says the National Strategic Plan for TB Elimination.

TB burden in India:
- India is the country with the largest TB burden in the world.
- The bacterial infection kills an estimated 4.80 lakh Indians every year and more than 1,400 every day.
- India also has more than a million **'missing' cases** every year that are not notified (despite a government directive on mandatory notification of TB cases) and most remain either undiagnosed or unaccountably and inadequately diagnosed and treated in the private sector.
- A joint monitoring committee set up to evaluate the TB programme had singled out fund constraint as a major challenge.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/health/tb-patients-to-get-rs-500-per-month-during-treatment-5000321/

Excluding bamboo from definition of 'tree'

Key pointers:
- For the Indian Forest (Amendment) Bill the government has argued that excluding bamboo from the definition of "tree" in the Indian Forest Act of 1927 will encourage cultivation of bamboo in non-forest areas and decrease dependence on imports.
- The amendment would enable farmers, especially those in the Northeast, to cultivate bamboo in non-forest areas and sell it without harassment from the forest department.
- It is part of the government's plan to double farmers' income by 2022.
- The opposition on the other hand has argued that the increase in cultivation [bamboo in non-forest areas] will be at the cost of forest areas. This is not pro-tribal or pro-poor. This will only benefit private entities like paper mills.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/rajya-sabha-bills-house-redefines-bamboo-clears-petroleum-institute-5001724/

Controlling the virtual world

Key pointers:
- Noting that "many are guided by inappropriate exposure to the Internet," the Supreme Court has held that the government has a role in controlling the virtual world.

- The court ordered major online search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Microsoft to co-operate with the Centre to make concrete suggestions against publication of online pre-natal sex determination ads rather than oppose any move to make the Internet safer.
- The Centre has been asked to brainstorm with the search engines, in the next six weeks, on ways to ensure that materials violating Indian laws prohibiting pre-natal sex determination were not hosted on websites.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/talk-to-search-engines-sc-tells-centre/article22288372.ece

Biosimilars

In news:
Biocon is the first Indian biotech company to get a US FDA nod for a biosimilar drug.

Key pointers:
- A biosimilar product is a biological product that is approved based on a showing that it is highly similar to an FDA-approved biological product, known as a reference product, and has no clinically meaningful differences in terms of safety and effectiveness from the reference product.
- When the patents of Biologics is no longer in force, many companies resort to release similar biologics called Biosimilar. At molecular level, Biosimilar is almost same as Biologics. Their key advantage is cost.
- Biosimilars can be called generic version of the Biologics, however, this is not technically correct because Biosimilars are not exactly like original drug.
- Biologics on the other hand, are large and complex (200-1000 times bigger than drugs) molecules, prepared within the living cells (such as engineered bacteria). Examples of biologics include various types of therapeutic proteins for example Serum Albumin, antibodies etc.
- Unlike small molecule generic drugs, the development of biosimilars is a highly expensive, complex and time-consuming exercise. This is because biosimilars are large and complex target-specific molecules, placed at the high end of the pharma value chain.

Article link: http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/biosimilars-need-huge-investments-longer-timelines/article10003662.ece

Bill criminalizing triple talaq passed in LS

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 Lok Sabha passed by voice vote the Bill that makes instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat a criminal offence, with a jail term of up to three years.

- The proposed law would be applicable to the entire country, except in Jammu and Kashmir.

- It would make instant talaq punishable and would be a cognisable, non-bailable offence.

- Government's take- **The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2017** — will act as a deterrent since there have been 100 cases of triple talaq even after the landmark judgment of the Supreme Court delivered in August this year.

- 22 Islamic countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh, had regulated instant triple talaq, there was no effective law in India till now.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/bill-to-criminalise-triple-talaq-passed-in-lok-sabha/article22321894.ece

Gaming disorder: A mental health condition

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Key pointers:

- With more and more youngsters getting hooked on video games, both online and offline, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is set to classify gaming disorder as a mental health condition next year.
- Mental health experts and psychiatrists said this is the need of the hour as nearly 7% of population studied for gaming and internet addiction exhibited symptoms of depression and anxiety, and somatisation, including behavioural changes and sleep disturbances.
- Although gaming disorder is affecting a small population now, it is likely to be a major mental health problem in the coming years. Especially, in the wake of Blue Whale and other such dangerous games, there is a need for parents to monitor their child's activities.
- Addictive use of Internet has an adverse effect in the form of irregular dietary habits and physical problems. It is also associated with insomnia, sleep apnea and nightmares.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/who-to-classify-gaming-disorder-as-mental-health-condition/article22320720.ece

India largest producer of milk in the world

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints.

Key pointers:
- During the past three years, India has outpaced the global milk production with an annual growth rate of 5.53% compared with the 2.09% achieved globally.
- India has been the largest producer of milk in the world for the past 15 years.
- Milk production, which was around 17-22 million tonnes in the 1960s, has increased to 163.7 million tonnes in 2016-17.
- Per capita availability of milk has increased from 307 grams in 2013-14 to 351 grams in the year 2016-17.

Path ahead:
To meet future challenges, the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (DAHDF) is working on a National Action Plan Vision 2022, where along with enhancing the outreach of dairy cooperatives to additional villages and milk producers, suitable provisions are being made to build additional milk processing infrastructure.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-leads-in-global-milk-production/article22320382.ece

The National Medical Commission Bill 2017

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 National Medical Commission Bill 2017 envisages allowing Ayush practitioners (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) to practise modern (allopathic) medicine after clearing a bridge course.
- The Bil seeks to overhaul the structure of medical education, introduce a medical exit examination and bring an end to the Medical Council of India.
- It envisages a "joint sitting" of the (National Medical) Commission, the Central Council of Homoeopathy and the Central Council of Indian Medicine at least once a year to decide

"approving specific bridge course that may be introduced for the practitioners of homoeopathy and of Indian Systems of Medicine to enable them to prescribe such modern medicines at such level as may be prescribed".

- A 25-member commission selected by a search committee headed by the Union Cabinet Secretary will replace the elected MCI.
- Four boards dealing with undergraduate, postgraduate medical education, medical assessment and rating and ethics and registration will regulate the sector. Replacing the MCI with a new regulatory structure was necessitated by allegations of corruption dogging the council ever since the arrest of its then chief Ketan Desai in 2010.

Article link: http://indianexpress.com/article/india/ayurveda-homoeopathy-docs-can-take-bridge-course-to-practise-allopathy-bill-5004425/

Amendment to Insolvency and Bankruptcy code

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Indian Economy

Key pointers:

Reality check for loan defaulters

The Amendment to the Bankruptcy Code is aimed at preventing defaulters from walking back into the management by paying only a fraction of the loan amount of a company

The Bill bars the following from submitting a debt resolution plan or participating in the liquidation process in case of defaults:

- Wilful defaulters

- Promoters or management of the company if it has an outstanding non-performing debt for over a year
- Disqualified directors

The government cannot allow loan defaulters to merrily walk back

ARUN JAITLEY, Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs

Pic credit: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/article22329388.ece/alternates/FREE_660/29-Phukan-InsolG4A350G741jpgjpg

- The Lok Sabha amended the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code law to prevent wilful defaulters and existing promoters from taking part in insolvency proceedings of stressed assets of companies unless they make their bad loans operational by paying up interests.
- Changes have had to be made to ensure that ineligible people do not find loopholes to walk back into the companies against which insolvency proceedings were initiated.

Article link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/lok-sabha-amends-bankruptcy-law/article22329389.ece

Smart Robo Cop

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Awareness in the field of robotics.

Key pointers:
- A life-sized robot, claimed to be the world's first smart policing robot, was launched in Hyderabad city.
- The bot called the Smart Robo Cop is equipped with cameras, and an array of sensors connected to GPS in its beta version and has been developed by H-Bots Robotics, a Hyderabad-based robotics technology company.
- All the components have been sourced from within the country.
- It has been created to support security systems in the city. The robot can move, recognise people, take complaints, detect bombs, identify suspects, interact with people and answer to queries.

How does it work?
- Placed in any locality, the robot has been equipped with a system where people can lodge a complaint with the police from where it is stationed. The complaints can be lodged through video, audio and photos.
- People can also make use of emergency services. For example, an accident can be reported from the spot or even if one wants to complain to the SHE Teams with the help of capture option that is available.

Article link: http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/hyderabad/2017/dec/29/worlds-first-smart-policing-robot-launched-in-hyderabad-1739880.html