

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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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 **32nd edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **January 2018**.

Value add's from IASbaba- Must Read and Connecting the dots.

Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets from November 2017 which shall guide you for better revision.

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

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

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

"The expert in anything was once a beginner"

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NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

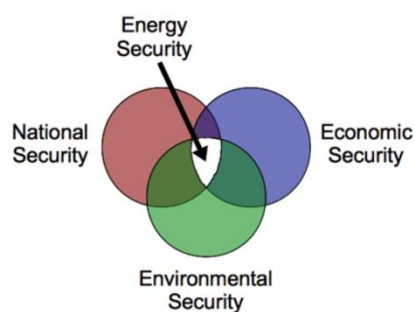
Energy Security: Challenges and Way forward

Introduction:

India is on its way to becoming a global economic powerhouse, and energy will lie at the heart of this transformation. The stakes could not be higher to bolster economic growth and enhance living conditions for this nation of 1.3 billion people, which uses just 6% of the world's energy. Unreliable electrical supplies hinder India's development. Further, India is home to eleven of the world's twenty most-polluted cities, according to the World Health Organization.

What is energy security?

Energy security is the association between national security and the availability of natural resources for energy consumption.



Challenges:

- The energy conundrum is how to provide universal access to affordable and reliable energy on one hand, and the imperative to weaken the linkage between economic growth, energy demand and environmental degradation on the other.
- The imbalances in the energy value chain. There is currently, for example, surplus generating power capacity but approximately 40 per cent of the country still faces power shortages and/or has no access to electricity.

- There are leakages across the transmission and distribution chain. The government is familiar with the problems. But they have difficulty implementing the solutions because of competitive Centre-state politics, status quo-driven vested interests and lack of resources.
- The growing bonhomie between Russia and China and their increasing engagement with the energy sector in the Middle East present India with an opportunity and a threat. An opportunity to move into the space vacated by the US. Also, the opportunity to resurrect economically compelling projects of mutual interest to all three countries (transnational gas pipelines). A threat in that China will use its economic weight to secure oil on preferential, exclusionary terms to the possible detriment of India's supply relations.

Way ahead:

- Securing fossil fuels along with a focus on "clean" renewables is the need of the hour. An integrated planning process that factors in the implications of decisions concerning fossil fuels on renewables and vice versa, and by developing a policy mindset that enables the fulfillment of short-term objectives without compromising longer-term goals.
- The short-term challenge is to correct the imbalances in the energy value chain, to minimise avoidable losses and create a unified energy market.
- The "successful" conclusion of GST offers a direction to solve the transmission and distribution losses. The government could contemplate something similar for the energy sector. A nationwide system brings in a simplified, transparent and national regulatory tariff and policy platform.
- The medium-to-long-term challenge is to redesign and restructure the institutions of energy governance to enable and facilitate holistic energy planning and an integrated energy market.

As a first step in that direction, the government should consider legislating an "energy responsibility and security act". This will raise public awareness on the interconnections between the various components of energy and between energy and the rest of the economy.

- Cities are the reasons for surging energy demand and air pollution. The government should devolve the energy administration of cities to an autonomous and constitutionally safeguarded "city energy ombudsman". These ombudsmen should be empowered to tackle issues related to energy efficiency, demand conservation, waste management, urban redesign and transportation and to develop and implement focused, small-scale and distributed solutions.
- India imports more than 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements. The international oil market is, therefore, a matter of strategic and commercial significance. India should thus hedge against unexpected volatility.

- China and Russia's growing involvement in the Middle East means we need to proactively reduce our import dependence on the region.
- Exploration and production is a long-gestation, capital-intensive and high-risk business; India does not have undiscovered reserves of "low-cost, easy oil". The ONGC should broaden its footprint to become a world-class energy company. It should contemplate integration with not just the downstream petroleum companies but also the renewables companies.
- The government has set ambitious targets for renewables and electric vehicles. It will have to invest in supportive infrastructure, regulations, skills and innovation. Niti Aayog must carry out a detailed study on what will be required to shift from the incumbent fossil fuel energy system to a "clean energy" system.

Conclusion:

Energy security is a sine qua non for a nation like India, which its huge population is aspiring to grow at a faster pace. But for this to happen the above mentioned steps must be taken.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by the term energy security? Discuss the challenges in making India energy secure and the way forward.

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.*

Next Wave of Structural Reforms: Democratising benefits

Background:

India has shown itself to be an especially exciting place on the world map in 2017. The last 12-18 months have been a significant period and one which could potentially affect the country several decades going forward. The defining feature of this period has undoubtedly been the **string of structural reforms**.

String of reforms:

As per the department of industrial policy and promotion (DIPP), we already implemented 122 reforms in India in 2017, with a further 90 on the anvil.

Deep-rooted structural reforms like the goods and services tax (GST), Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) and Real Estate Regulatory Act (RERA) have struck at the core of long-festering problems around taxation, asset quality, financial inclusion and housing for all. As the benefit of these reforms flows incrementally into the system, they will help resolve the current challenges around these issues and give an overall boost to economic growth.

The striking part of these reforms is their breadth in terms of coverage across industries and the depth to which these have tried to address existing structural challenges plaguing the country.

Welcomed by the global community:

The reforms have also received validation and approval from investors, both domestic and overseas.

- The rapid rise in the market is a thumbs up from investors for the reforms-focused agenda.
- The ratings upgrade from Moody's.
- The improvement in the ease-of-doing-business ranking.

Time for next wave of reforms: Democratizing the benefits

While a lot has been done on the reforms side, **a lot remains to be done**. Key reforms in areas like agriculture and labour, specifically for job creation, will help **democratize the benefit of reforms** to all possible sections of society.

- **Job creation** remains an important issue for the country, despite several efforts in this direction.

While the boost to the manufacturing segments through other initiatives will provide a collateral benefit to job creation, it is important to explicitly chart out a strong policy road map for job creation and adhere to it. **Vocational training**, especially, will play an important role in this road map. A lot of effort has gone into making vocational training mainstream, but with limited success. Integrating this into the school curriculum while revitalizing the education imparted in government schools can have a galvanizing effect in the long term. At the same time, a well-funded **cluster development mechanism** could align the micro, small and medium enterprises' growth with the job-creation agenda, particularly in the organized sphere.

- The government has drafted an ambitious target of **doubling farmer income** by 2022. It has made some notable efforts, including Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), electronic agriculture market (e-NAM) and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, among others.

While some of these have seen immediate adoption (like PMFBY), some schemes have lagged in execution. Others will only show an impact in the long term. In this regard, the **role of NITI Aayog** becomes very important. NITI Aayog is now directly working with states

to bring about a transformation in the agriculture sector by initiating a series of reforms, including contract farming, online spot and futures trading, and facilitating and incentivising the private sector to invest in agriculture logistics and cold chains, among other things. What is important is good execution and a feedback loop to ensure that reforms continues in desired direction and pace.

- **Labour reforms** are a key ingredient of scale-up on the manufacturing side. Long-term growth cannot be sustained solely by the services sector. With the strong focus on 'Make in India', the time is opportune to undertake a variety of labour reforms. The principal shortcoming currently is around the lack of a holistic labour policy which can contribute towards making a competitive manufacturing and service ecosystem in the country. Any policy which is drafted must aim to substitute rigid controls with transparency, while ensuring that the basic rights of workers are well protected.

Conclusion:

The spate of reforms that have been undertaken have rightly received widespread acclaim. However, it would be erroneous to think that the job is done. The government should recognize the need to keep pushing forward with the reforms agenda.

Connecting the dots:

- What are structural reforms brought in by recent government. While reforms undertaken have rightly received widespread acclaim, more reforms are required especially with regards to job creation, doubling farmers' income and labour reforms. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

General studies 3:

- *Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.*

Bringing agriculture marketing into Union/Concurrent list

Background:

More than ever before, the country's agricultural marketing sector is garnering attention. NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand, strongly underlined in an article that it is imperative to bring

agriculture marketing into the Concurrent or Union list to benefit farmers. Currently it is under state list as per Schedule 7 of our constitution. There is opposition to the move.

Moving agriculture marketing into concurrent or union list:

- Most States have welcomed the proposal to move agriculture marketing into either the Concurrent or Union list from the State list as this will guarantee remunerative prices to farmers.
- Some major States continue to offer stiff resistance saying this will pave the way for the death of agriculture and is against the spirit of cooperative federalism.
- The Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income under the chairmanship of Ashok Dalwai, in its draft report, justifies the recommendation saying marketing has no boundaries; this necessitates a pan-India operation to meet the demand across the country.
- The committee has also recommended rolling out the model Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act 2017 which would facilitate single-point levy of taxes, promote direct interface between farmers and end-users, and give freedom to farmers to sell their produce to whomsoever and wherever they get better prices.

If States continue to oppose the proposed reforms which promise to allow farmers a wider choice of markets beyond the local mandi, the losers will be none other than the farmers themselves.

Why market integration is important?

- The country's food production has increased tremendously from just 51 million tonnes in 1950-51 to about 252 million tonnes in 2014-15. However, farm income did not grow much. This was also highlighted by the National Commission on Farmers (NCF) headed by MS Swaminathan. The income realised from cultivation at current prices worked out to be only about Rs. 101 a day during 2012-13. The National Commission on Agriculture (1976) as well as the NCF (2006) had categorically emphasised that higher output alone will not provide higher income to farmers unless it is well marketed. Recent incidents of farmers reportedly dumping their bumper produce of tomatoes and onions and emptying cans of milk into drains is evidence of it. Had the markets been integrated, the surplus produce would have been transferred to deficit regions.
- The seasonal spike in prices of perishable commodities that pushes up the food inflation cannot be addressed without market reforms.
- Production and marketing should march together in order to benefit farmers and consumers. Farmers need to be empowered to **decide when, where, to whom and at what price to sell.**

The state of agriculture market:

- Farmers' participation in agriculture markets is worrisome. The **Dalwai Committee** on Doubling Farmers' Income has pointed out that the share of farmers in consumer's price is very low; it generally varies from 15 to 40 per cent. Studies conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute and World Bank have confirmed this.
- The dominant role of middlemen is primarily responsible for farmers not realising a reasonable price for their produce, lowering farm income and profitability. This was recognised by the 12th Plan's Working Group on Agriculture Marketing (2011). The agriculture markets are crowded with middlemen and commission agents. According to Ashok Gulati, commission agents in Delhi charge exorbitant fees ranging from 6 per cent to 15 per cent.
- The Committee of State Ministers, in charge of Agricultural Marketing to Promote Reforms (2013) has highlighted that cold storage units exist in less than one-tenth of the markets and grading facilities in less than one-third; electronic weigh-bridges are available only in a few markets, post-harvest losses of various commodities ranged from 6 to 18 per cent.

Challenges:

- Almost 40 per cent of all fruits and vegetables are lost annually in India between the grower and the consumer mainly due to lack of storage facilities, a weak transportation system and bad roads.
- Climate change is expected to make the situation worse.
- States alone cannot revamp the agricultural marketing sector, primarily due to paucity of funds and technology.

Way forward:

- Private investment on a massive scale needs to be invited to upgrade and build large storage and warehousing systems that are climate resilient.
- The intermediary culture needs to be scrapped completely.
- Sweeping reforms will see light only when agricultural marketing is brought under the Concurrent or Union list with the consent of the States.

Conclusion:

The country will achieve food security only when the income of farmers is secured and doubled. And for doubling farmers' income we need not focus only on increasing production/yield, market reforms as stated above are equally important.

Connecting the dots:

- The state of agricultural market in India is still poor. Discuss. Also suggest how bringing agricultural marketing into concurrent or union list would be right step moving forward.

TOPIC***General Studies 1:***

- *Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.*

General studies 2:

- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*
- *Role of civil services in a democracy.*
- *Development processes and the development industry- the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.*

Social Enterprises**Introduction:**

The ideology of 'privatisation' of economies and societies has advanced so much around the world in the last 30 years that the very concept of 'economic reforms' has become restricted to reductions in the role of government and more freedom for business corporations. There is realisation now that business corporations set up to make profits for their investors cannot be the solution to many challenges that societies must address such as increasing inequity, persistent poverty, and poor public health and education in large parts of the world. They may even be the causes of some of these problems. Neither have government-owned enterprises solved these problems very well. Therefore, new forms of enterprises must be designed to solve them.

Issue with present enterprises:

- The distance between the wealth of the richest one per cent and the wealth of the rest of the world has been increasing over the past 30 years. Almost all the income and wealth of people at the top comes from their association with business corporations, as investors or managers, from corporate profits and stock prices, and from bonuses and salaries.
- The power of corporations to influence governments and fix 'the rules of the game' regarding taxation, international trade, and their own regulation, is also being resented by citizens.
- Mistrust of for-profit business corporations that run public services such as hospitals and educational institutions, is growing in India and elsewhere too.

Now new forms of business enterprises are required that will serve public purposes more democratically.

The concept of a 'social enterprise':

Has been propagated by Muhammad Yunus and some others.

It reconciles the essentials of democracy with the requirements of good economics.

- Social enterprises are democratic enterprises. They belong to the people, produce benefits for the people, and are run by the people. Whereas capitalist enterprises are owned by their investors, produce profits for them, and are run by their agents.
- Social enterprises are economically self-sustaining: its income must covers its costs. Whereas capitalist enterprises go much further since their success is measured by the amount of profits they produce.
- The success of a social enterprise is measured by the public benefits it produces: the number and quality of livelihoods it generates, or the quality, cost, and reach of the public services — healthcare, education, energy, water, etc — it provides.
- Social enterprises need capital to start. They can obtain it from the state or from philanthropists. While they do not produce profits for their capital providers, they produce enough economic margin in their operations to return the capital.
- Social enterprises enable people to stand on their own feet, reducing dependence on the charity of others. They also use all their energy to produce what people need, not distracted by the need to increase shareholder's financial return.
- These enterprises produce more sustainable 'bang-for-the-buck' impact on the lives of citizens at the bottom of the pyramid than can conventional philanthropy and CSR(Corporate Social Responsibility).

Thus, social enterprises are a solution that can produce much larger outcomes from the same amount of 'charity' money than can be produced by organisations that must rely on a continuous stream of grants and donations.

Examples:

The concept of social enterprises is not entirely new. Cooperative enterprises, producer companies, and so on are operating in many countries and in many industries. Amul and SEWA in India and the Grameen organisations in Bangladesh are some examples of different shapes of social enterprises.

Capitalist enterprises:

Capitalist business enterprises generate large amounts of wealth for their investors and top executives. Wealthy people are being pressed to give more to philanthropy and corporations to give more to CSR. In this way, the people below become dependent on the '**trickle down**' from the accumulating wealth at the top. Inequities are increasing because the pace of the trickle-down has not been commensurate with the pace of accumulation at the top. The trickle-down route is much less effective than social enterprises in improving citizens' well-being.

Conclusion:

The growing band of 'impact investors' (and philanthropists and CSR managers), who wish to multiply the generation of more jobs and livelihoods and produce better public services around the world, should support the growth of more such social enterprises. And governments must ease the regulatory hindrances on their growth with even more zest than they apply to easing regulations for the growth of large, for-profit companies.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by the term 'social enterprise'? How are these different from capitalist enterprise? Discuss.
- Social enterprises can go a long way in generating more jobs and livelihoods and producing better public services for the common people when compared to capitalist enterprises. Comment.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.*
- *Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

Updated National Register of Citizens(NRC) of Assam

Introduction:

The first draft of the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC) of Assam has been published recently by the Office of the State Coordinator of NRC on December 31, 2017. The objective behind updating and publishing the 1951 NRC is to compile a list of the names of genuine Indian citizens residing in Assam and, in the process, detect foreigners (read Bangladeshis) who may have illegally entered the state after March 24, 1971. Of the 3.29 crore residents of Assam who applied for the inclusion of their names in the NRC by submitting legacy documents, 1.9 crore names have been included as citizens in the initial list.

Background:

The publication of the initial NRC list is the outcome of a long-standing demand of the Assamese people to detect and deport illegal Bangladeshi migrants from their state.

- The Assam Accord of 1985 did not contain any specific mention of updating the NRC.

- The Government of India constituted a number of Tribunals and Appellate Courts under both the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983 and the Foreigners Tribunal Act of 1964 to detect illegal Bangladeshis.
- In May 2005 that the first step towards updating the NRC of 1951 was taken, when a tripartite meeting between the Centre, the Assam government and AASU was held to review the progress made in the implementation of the Assam Accord.
- Successive governments have been extremely reluctant to update the NRC of 1951 due to various political considerations and vested interests. Supreme Court ordered the Union and State governments to begin the process of updating of the NRC in Assam.
- Accordingly, the Ministry of Home Affairs, issued the notification for starting the work of updating the NRC. The Supreme Court constituted a Committee “to take care of any clarification that would be required with regard to the modalities in the preparation of the NRC.”

Significance of updated NRC:

The publication of the updated NRC is a positive step in so far as-

- It is an important milestone in dealing with the influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh into that state.
- It puts to rest wild speculations about the extent of the illegal migrant population in Assam and the resulting polarization that political parties have been exploiting to make electoral gains.

Issues and apprehensions:

- Given that a **proper documentation system does not exist in the country**, for most of those whose names do not appear in the NRC, procuring the required documents, especially birth certificates, in order to establish their citizenship is difficult.
- Another issue is **what happens to those people whose names do not figure in the final NRC** and are declared illegal entrants into the state. The popular rhetoric for dealing with such illegal migrants has always been to deport them to Bangladesh, but this is easier said than done. Bangladesh has consistently denied that its citizens have illegally emigrated to India. Although the Supreme Court in its order of 2014 had instructed the Government of India to enter into discussions with Bangladesh on streamlining the deportation of illegal Bangladeshis, nothing has happened on the ground. The absence of any clear policy as to how to deal with the proclaimed illegal migrants has created a sense of unease in the minds of many presently residing in Assam.
- Many illegal migrants who were earlier declared foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunals have either absconded to other states to evade arrest or are dead. Since the deportation of illegal migrants is not feasible, the only option before the government is to let them reside

in the country on humanitarian grounds but after stripping them of all citizenship rights. While the NRC is being updated for Assam, there is no plan to prepare similar NRCs for the other states in the North East where illegal migration continues to be a volatile issue.

Conclusion:

The need of the hour is for the Union Government to allay apprehensions presently in the minds of the people of Assam and take steps to contain any adverse fallout after the publication of the final draft of the NRC. At the same time, it also needs to spell out what it intends to do with the persons whose names do not figure in the final NRC.

Connecting the dots:

- An updated National Register of Citizens (NRC) of Assam has been published this year. What was the need of the list? Discuss its significance and associated issues, if any.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders*
- *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*

Inefficient land use by government

Introduction- the problem of unused land:

A large proportion of government land lies unused. The Ministries of Railways and Defence, respectively, have 43,000 hectares and 32,780 hectares of land lying vacant, without even any proposed use. According to reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), the 13 major port trusts have 14,728 hectares of land lying idle. Land is a crucial and often constraining input for production, not only in agriculture but also in secondary and tertiary sectors. The problem of land scarcity has been aggravated by grossly wasteful land use by government agencies. While stock of land is fixed, its supply as an input in production is not — it crucially depends on land use patterns.

Issues:

- Land hoarding by government agencies has created artificial scarcity and is one of the main drivers of skyrocketing urban real estate prices. Even after the recent correction in property prices, middle- and lower-income households find adequate housing unaffordable. High land prices also reduce competitiveness by increasing the cost of industrial and development projects.
- The allocation of unused land is rife with corruption. Scams involving the Adarsh Cooperative Housing Society, the Srinagar airfield project, and the Kandla Port Trust are a few of the many examples of alleged complicity between private developers and local officials to misuse government land.
- The CAG also reports that none of the government agencies maintains adequate ownership records. For instance, the 13 major ports have failed to produce title deeds for as much as 45% of their land holdings. This makes squatters difficult to evict, and so they gravitate to these areas.
- Large areas of unused or underutilised government land with an irresponsibly low FSI is an issue.
The problem is most acute in government residences and office locales. Indian metros thus have the lowest FSI compared to those in other developing countries with similar population densities. The FSI in Shanghai is four times of that of Delhi and Mumbai.
- A report by the CAG on Special Economic Zones shows that as much as 31,886 hectares, or 53% of the total land acquired by the government for these zones, remains unused — land which would have been put to more productive use by its original owners.

Way ahead:

In a welcome initiative, the Centre has asked departments to identify surplus land. Unfortunately, agencies aren't cooperating.

- The need of the hour is a **comprehensive inventory** of land resources and usage patterns for all government branches. It should include information on the location of each property, its dimensions, the legal title, current and planned use, and any applicable land use restrictions.
This will enable effective identification of suboptimal land use, as well as of the land that is surplus.
- Surplus land should be utilised to meet the ever-growing demands for services, such as water and waste disposal, as well for government-sponsored housing and transportation projects.
- Land intended for future use can be rented out till such time it is needed, through a transparent auctioning process. This will prevent plots of land lying waste for years.
- A public-government partnership can be the way out. We could take a cue from Britain. There, the government has pledged to provide details of ownership, location, and intended

use for all properties. Citizens are invited to contest official land use and suggest alternatives.

Conclusion:

The problem of inefficient land use by government departments and public sector units is complicated and endemic. Given the importance of land for the country, we need to be creative in finding solutions. As a first step, the government should agree to disclose its land use and release of excess land, the use of which it cannot justify.

Connecting the dots:

- Land has become a scarce resource in India. In this light discuss the problem of inefficient land use by government departments and public-sector units. Suggest how the issue can be resolved.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health*
- *Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders*

General Studies 3:

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

Achieving SDGs in an effective manner

Introduction:

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are inspiring many people around the world. It seems there is a consensus about the goals. The question is, how can the stakeholders work together more effectively to achieve them.

Background:

The Club of Rome warned in 1972 that humanity would face a "Tragedy of the Commons" if it persisted with its paradigm of economic growth. Its warnings were largely ignored. Since then, more reforms within the prevalent paradigm enabled long periods of economic growth around the world. Meanwhile, systemic problems of environmental degradation, climate change, and

economic inequities got worse. The SDGs are a realization that humanity cannot postpone much longer the development of new strategies for the management of the commons.

The 17 SDGs:

These fall into four groups.

- Poverty, hunger, health, education, and gender equality relate directly to human development.
- Water, energy, climate action, life below water, and life on land belong to the environment group.
- The third group relates to the economy: decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, responsible consumption and production, and industry innovation.
- The fourth group, of the last two SDGs, viz. “peace, justice and strong institutions”, and “partnerships for growth”, is the means by which results will be produced in the other groups of goals.

Systemic issues:

Problems such as persistent poverty and inequality, poor health, and environmental degradation that the SDGs aim to solve are systemic issues. They have multiple interacting causes.

They cannot be solved by any one actor.

Working with the commons:

Philanthropists are “giving back” to society in programmes aligned with the SDGs—as are business corporations through CSR (corporate social responsibility). Philanthropists and corporates tie up with NGOs. Large, international NGOs, working on any issue around the world—such as the care of children, the concerns of the elderly, or the protection of the environment—know that they must work in partnership with local communities. “Government by the people”, which is the essence of good, democratic governance, requires government executives to work with local communities to improve the commons.

Issue- Top down programmes:

The issue is that Governments construct centralized, top-down programmes. And corporate CSR, as well as international NGO programmes, are managed centrally to achieve scale and to improve efficiency by deploying best practices.

There are three problems with this approach.

- One size does not fit all.
- Many different capabilities that must be brought together to address systemic issues are unable to collaborate with each other easily on the ground when all of them, whether in

government, an international NGO, or a global philanthropy, are “reporting up” to their respective bosses at their centres.

- The people who must be the ultimate beneficiaries of the solutions, and who can contribute significantly to their design and implementation, have inadequate voices in the design and management of expert-driven, top-down programmes.

Way forward:

Strong institutions founded on principles of partnership, cooperation, and universal justice, which the last two SDGs underline, are essential.

A new model of enterprises is required:

Faster progress towards the SDGs will require new models of enterprises in which the people must have a much greater say in governance.

Issue:

The tragedy of the commons is caused by the clash of two sets of rights along with two fundamental principles of good governance. The fundamental principle driving democracy is human rights. Every individual, rich or poor, has a right to fundamental human needs such as health and education, and also to equal political rights in the governance of their societies. The fundamental principle driving the growth of capitalist economies is the right to private property—which is consonant with a concept in economics that human beings are self-interested agents who will take care of only what they own. These two principles lead to very different principles for the governance of enterprises. Whereas in democratic governance every human being, even if she owns nothing, must have equal voice, in capitalist enterprises, those who own more (e.g. shares of a company) must have proportionally more weight in governance.

Way out:

An innovation in enterprise design to reconcile this dilemma is the concept of “social enterprises” promoted by Muhammad Yunus and others. The owners of social enterprise are the beneficiaries of its services and profits. Social enterprises stand in between the domains of for-profit corporations on one side (which extract and accumulate wealth from the commons) and charity, philanthropy, and CSR on the other side (which then “give back” to repair damage to the commons and “do good”).

Conclusion:

Strong institutions and partnerships for growth could be the keys to progress on the SDGs. Innovations in the design of cooperative institutions—of the people, by the people, for the people—are required to reconcile the democratic principle of equal human rights, with the capitalist principle of property rights.

Connecting the dots:

- Strong institutions and partnerships for growth could be the keys to progress on the SDGs. Analyse.

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*

Electoral Bonds: Issues**In news:**

In line with its promise to clean up the political funding system, the Centre recently unveiled the contours of the 'Electoral Bonds' scheme, which seeks to ensure the flow of clean money to political parties, without revealing the donors' names.

About electoral bonds:

- Electoral bonds will be a bearer instrument in the nature of a Promissory Note and an interest-free banking instrument.
- A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India will be eligible to purchase the bond from specified branches of the State Bank of India.
- The bonds can be purchased for any value in multiples of ₹1,000; ₹10,000; ₹1 lakh; ₹10 lakh; and ₹1 crore.
- The bonds will not carry the name of the payee and will be valid only for 15 days during which it can be used to make a donation only to certain political parties.
- To benefit from the electoral bonds scheme, the political parties must have been registered with the Election Commission and should have secured not less than 1 per cent of the votes polled in the most recent General Election to the Lok Sabha or a State legislative assembly.
- The bonds can be encashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with an authorised bank.

How will the Bonds help? The current system of cash donations from “anonymous or pseudonymous” sources is “wholly non-transparent”, and “the donor, the donee, the quantum of donations and the nature of expenditure are all undisclosed”. The government says the system of Bonds will encourage political donations of “clean money” from individuals,

companies, HUF, religious groups, charities, etc. After purchasing the bonds, these entities can hand them to political parties of their choice, which must redeem them within the prescribed time.

Issue of black money in politics:

- As per the Association of Democratic Reforms, between 2004-05 and 2014-15, 69% of the total income of political parties was from unknown sources.
- The Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption had raised the issue of black money in politics as far back as in 1964.

A number of committees and commissions have addressed the electoral finance issue since. Their recommendations have never been implemented.

Objectives of Electoral finance reform:

- Remove black money and under-the-table contributions from the system.
- Increase transparency so that citizens can see where the money is coming from and where it's going.
- Ensuring transparency in political funding. The 255th Law Commission Report on Electoral Reforms observed that opacity in political funding results in "lobbying and capture" of the government by big donors. The lower the transparency in political funding, the easier it is for the super-rich to buy the kind of government they want.

Regulations:

- Declaration norms are governed by four legislations: the Representation of the People Act (RPA), the IT Act, the Companies Act, and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA).
- Under these laws, political parties have to declare the source and the amount donated for all contributions above ₹20,000.
- Companies have to declare in their profit and loss (P&L) statement the party-wise break-up of political donations. Also, a company must be at least three years old to contribute to a party. Its contribution cannot be more than 7.5% of its average net profit in the three preceding years.
- Parties cannot accept foreign contributions.

The Finance Act 2016, amended the FCRA to allow political parties to accept donations from foreign companies. This year, the Finance Act 2017 amended the RPA, the Companies Act and the IT Act.

Issues:

- The voting public will not know which individual, company, or organisation has funded which party, and to what extent.

- At the same time, the fact that the SBI — and by implication, the government — will know who is getting what from whom can open up the possibility of arm twisting or harassment of those seen to be supporting parties or ideologies that are opposed to the government.
- Corporates and businesspersons, while availing tax benefits, were wary of political donations because they can't remain anonymous. This concern will no more be there with electoral bonds. So, the scheme can be seen as enabling donors to donate more.
- Electoral bonds share with tax havens the two characteristics that make the latter such attractive destinations for black money: secrecy and anonymity.
- The amendment done for electoral bonds eliminates the 7.5% cap on company donations (which means even loss-making companies can make unlimited donations).
- The requirement for a company to have been in existence for three years is also gone (paving the way for fly-by-night shell companies).
- Companies no longer need to declare the names of the parties to which they have donated (so shareholders won't know where their money has gone).
- As for political parties, they no longer need to reveal the donor's name for contributions above ₹20,000, provided these are in the form of electoral bonds.

Other measures:

- In 2013, the Central Information Commission had declared the six national parties to be within the **ambit of the Right to Information Act**. The parties have been united in disregarding this. Party accounts are audited by those appointed by the parties themselves, and regulations stipulating deadlines for submitting donation statements and income-tax returns to the Election Commission are disregarded frequently.
- **State funding of elections**- State funding has a proven record in a number of countries that have made the transition over the decades from corporate donations.

Issue:

In countries where it has worked—Germany, Japan, Canada, Sweden, to name a few—it has been accompanied by strict, well-enforced regulatory frameworks regarding auditing and disclosure of party income and expenditure. In the absence of such frameworks, state funding in India is a non-starter, as the Law Commission Report (1999) and Venkatachaliah Committee Report (2002) have pointed out. It would provide an additional source of party funding but without denting black money revenue streams.

National Electoral Fund- An alternative:

All donors will be able to contribute to this fund. The funds would be allocated to political parties in proportion to the votes they get. Not only would this protect the identity of donors, it would also weed out black money from political funding.

Conclusion:

The government has done well to take up the issue of electoral finance. To clean up the system seriously, it must focus on increasing the accountability of political parties.

Connecting the dots:

- What are electoral bonds? What is the objective behind introducing it? How far will it help in ensuring that the objective is achieved? Discuss.

TOPIC***General Studies 2:***

- *Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.*
- *Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

Hindi as an official language of the UN: Issues**In news:**

Steps have been taken by the Union government to make Hindi an official language at the United Nations. If the government were to succeed, Hindi would become the seventh official language of the UN after Arabic, English, Russian, French, Spanish and Chinese.

Issues:

- For Hindi to be accepted as an official language of the UN, it will involve the adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly with a two-thirds majority. At first sight, it appears the government is on a weak legal basis to embark on this complex pursuit to move a resolution to change the official languages of the UN and persuade at least 129 countries to vote in favour of such a resolution.
- It is worrying that the minister says the government is ready to foot a bill of Rs 400 crore every year when there is no indication that the finance ministry has accorded the provisional sanction of funds or made any budgetary allocation in this regard over the past two years.

Hindi over other languages:

The core issue is whether and why Hindi should be promoted over other languages spoken in India. **Article 343** of the Constitution of India deems English and Hindi to be official languages of the Union. There are more than 600 million (close to 60 per cent) non-Hindi speakers in the country, according to the 2001 Census data. There are **22 languages recognised as official languages by the Eighth Schedule** of the Constitution. There have been repeated requests by non-Hindi speakers to give these languages constitutional status equal to that of English and Hindi.

It is ironic that the government is expending significant diplomatic capital trying to place Hindi along with the **six official languages of the UN** when they have consistently denied equal official language status to the languages in the Eighth Schedule.

Hindi-isation:

- The government last year accepted the recommendation made by the Committee of Parliament on Official Language that “all dignitaries including Hon’ble President and all the ministers especially who can read and speak Hindi may be requested to give their speech/statement in Hindi only”. Public sector banks, the Railways and other Central government-run services are all tacitly being Hindi-ised.
- Parliament too is not really a multi-lingual institution. Article 120(1) of the Constitution states the speaker “may permit any member who can not adequately express himself in Hindi or in English to address the House in his mother tongue”. Moreover, the Rajya Sabha Handbook indicates that Parliament provides simultaneous interpretation services for Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, Punjabi, Oriya, Tamil and Urdu only. When a member speaks in any of these nine languages, the speeches are translated into Hindi and English only. Therefore, a Malayalam-speaker will not have his speech translated to Bengali but only to Hindi and English. Compare this with the European Union Parliament in Strasbourg where 23 languages are simultaneously translated into one another.

Conclusion:

Without making the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha multilingual and inclusive, any efforts to make Hindi an official language of the UN will renew the fears of non-Hindi speakers.

Connecting the dots:

- The government in aiming to make Hindi an official language at the United Nations. Discuss the issues pertaining to the same.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.*
- *Issues relating to poverty and hunger.*

General Studies 3:

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

Poor Internal Labour Mobility

Introduction:

India is becoming more integrated. Goods and services are beginning to flow more freely thanks to recent reforms. But, to increase economic growth and reduce poverty, people too need to move to where they are most productive. Even though the rate of migration doubled between 2001 and 2011 relative to the previous decade, state borders remain impediments to mobility: Labour migrant flows within states are much larger than flows across states. In China, for example, eliminating impediments to internal migration could boost national income by an estimated 10 per cent — a bigger gain than from reducing internal trade costs.

Poor internal labour mobility:

- Indians, particularly men seeking education and jobs, are surprisingly reluctant to cross state borders.
- Internal migrants represented 30 per cent of India's population in 2001, the latest Census round for which comprehensive data on migration flows are available. Two-thirds were migrants within districts, and more than half were women migrating for marriage.
- Census data reveals that internal migration rates across states were nearly four times higher in Brazil and China, and more than nine times higher in the United States in the five years ending in 2001.
- Other researchers found that India ranked last in a comparison of internal migration in 80 countries.

The restrictiveness of state borders:

Migration between neighbouring districts in the same state is at least 50 per cent more than migration between neighbouring districts in different states. Consider Nagpur, a district in central India (Maharashtra) and close to three other states — Telangana, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The four neighbouring districts in Maharashtra (Bhandara, Wardha, Amravati, and Chandrapur) sent a total of 31 per cent of Nagpur's immigrants. The remaining three neighbouring districts in Madhya Pradesh (Balaghat, Chhindwara, and Seoni) sent a total of only

13 per cent. In fact, more migrants came to Nagpur from other districts in Maharashtra hundreds of kilometres away than from neighbouring districts in other states.

Reasons behind:

- The entitlement programmes implemented at the state level: Major social benefits are not portable across state boundaries since they are administered by state governments, even when they are centrally funded. For example, access to subsidised food through the public distribution system (PDS), and even admission to public hospitals has been administered through “ration cards”, issued and accepted only by the home state government. We find that in states where the PDS offers higher levels of coverage, unskilled migrants are less likely to move out-of-state.
- For those seeking higher education and skilled jobs- Many universities and technical institutes are administered by state governments, and state residents get preferential admission through “state quota seats”. For example, the state quota in state medical colleges is more than 70 per cent in Maharashtra. The “domicile certificates” necessary for eligibility for the state quota require continuous residence in the state, ranging from three years in Uttar Pradesh to 10 in Rajasthan. Thus, the relative share of migrants moving out-of-state to seek higher education is lower in states with higher rates of access to tertiary education.
- In most states, more than three-fourths of government jobs are with the state rather than central government. State domicile is a common requirement for jobs in state government entities.

The impact of the discrimination in state employment should diminish as the private sector grows. However, some states are coming up with “jobs for natives” policies. In 2016, Karnataka announced that both public and private sector firms would have to reserve 70 per cent of their jobs for state residents, or lose access to state government industrial policy benefits. Odisha, Maharashtra, and Himachal Pradesh have similar quotas for state residents in factory jobs.

Way ahead:

Portability of benefits- A nationally portable identity is an important step. The disincentive to move will disappear only when, say, someone from Bihar can access all social benefits when they move to Maharashtra. And those benefits would need to include access to public hospitals and schools even when people move from one state to another.

Conclusion:

India’s “fragmented entitlements” are likely to dampen growth and perpetuate pockets of poverty by preventing people from seeking the most productive opportunities across the entire

country. Only when each Indian state grants all Indian citizens equal access to benefits, education and employment, will India really be on the move.

Connecting the dots:

- Internal migration in India is very poor. Discuss the reasons behind and implications of the same.

TOPIC

General Studies 1:

- *Social empowerment*

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

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

Low women's labour force participation: Conservative attitudes

Introduction:

Indian women's labour force participation, at just 27 per cent, is ranked 170 out of the world's 188 economies. Not only is Indian women's labour-force participation among the lowest in the world, research suggests it may be declining. This is despite rising education levels and declining fertility.

At the same time, it is not the case that women are not interested in working- According to India's 2011 National Sample Survey, over one-third of women primarily engaged in household work expressed the desire to have a job.

Cause of concern:

- For one, women cannot contribute to India's economic growth if they are not fully participating in the workforce.
- Also, working women tend to have greater bargaining power in their households, which could translate to better outcomes both for their children and themselves.
- Evidence suggests that women with access to networks outside the home can gain a civic and political consciousness, which can benefit their communities and society.

Explanations for low women's participation in the labour force:

- For women in exploitative jobs, poor working conditions are clearly problematic.
- The widespread belief that women should not work outside the home is based on a conservative view that elevates a man's status if the women in his household are "able" to stay at home.

And although it is commonly assumed that education will break down conservative social attitudes, many among the educated ones also believe that women should not work outside the home.

These **attitudes of patriarchy have been internalised** even by women and the most educated.

What can be done to counter these conservative attitudes?

- The government must loudly and persistently condemn the visible and invisible ways in which patriarchal attitudes disempower women.
- Aggressive implementation of policies that will encourage women's work is critical.
 - > For example, macroeconomic evidence from OECD countries suggests that childcare subsidies can stimulate female labour participation by raising the returns of work outside the home. But while crèches and daycare facilities in India are mandated as per policy, they are often non-functional or do not exist near the women who need them.
 - > There is also evidence that paid parental leave and job guarantees have a positive effect on female workforce participation. Although India's new maternity leave policy is quite generous by international standards, it does not cover the vast majority of working women engaged in the informal sector, and its costs are to be borne wholly by employers, potentially hurting the demand for female labour.
- Lessons from developed countries may not apply in the deeply patriarchal Indian context. Thus, more data on women's time use and perceived costs and benefits of being in the workforce is needed to make women's contribution visible, learn about the constraints they face, and determine which policies are likely to expand work opportunities.

Conclusion:

Each one of us must engage in reflection and dialogue to recognise and counter gender inequality. By not addressing the attitudes that confine women's choices and public presence, we are doing a costly mistake to so vastly limit India's potential. Until women and women's work are valued at par with men and men's work, it is likely that many capable women will be left out of contributing to India's development.

Connecting the dots:

- Attitudes of patriarchy have been internalised even by women and the most educated, keeping women's labour force participation rate in India low. Discuss. Also suggest measures to counter these conservative attitudes.

TOPIC***General studies 2:***

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

General studies 3:

- *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it*
- *Investment and Infrastructure*
- *Agrarian/Rural distress and Rural Development*

Role of construction sector in addressing rural distress**Introduction:**

Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) or Rural Census had highlighted that - '**landlessness**' and '**dependence on manual casual labour**' for livelihood - are key deprivations facing rural families.

SECC data has shown worrying levels of rural poverty.

SECC's 7 Deprivation Indicators:

SECC census aims to rank rural households based on 7 Deprivation Indicators.

1. Households with only one room, kucha walls and kucha roof
2. Households without an adult member in working age (between the ages of 16 and 59)
3. Female headed households with no adult male member between 16 and 59
4. Households with a disabled member or without able-bodied adult
5. Households of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST)
6. Households without literate adults over 25 years
7. the landless engaged in manual labour

The more the number of above parameters on which a household is deprived, the worse its extent of poverty.

Households with the highest deprivation score will

- Be first included in the BPL list.
- Be first given benefit of Government welfare schemes.

According to SECC,

- 48.5% of all rural households suffer from at least one deprivation indicator
- nearly 30% have two deprivations, 13% have three
- only 0.01% suffer from all seven handicaps

“Landless households engaged in manual labour” are the most vulnerable:

According to SECC, nearly 54 million households are in the landless-labourer category and around 84% of all those who hold agricultural land are small and marginal farmers.

Along with landless families, small and marginal farmers are getting pauperized (a state of extreme poverty or destitution) and more engaged in manual labour.

The intersection of any of the six other handicaps with “landless labour” makes it more acute or worse (as shown below)

- 59% of households with kuchha houses are landless labourers
- 55% of those with no literate adult above 25 years are landless labourers
- 54% each of SC/ST households and female-headed households without adult male members are also landless households
- 47% households without an adult member of working age are landless labourers
- 45% of those with disabled members and no able-bodied adult members are landless labourers

Small and marginal farmers, equally vulnerable

The overall farm size of small and marginal farmers has been dropping since the early 1970s, and down from the 2.25 hectares (ha) average to a 1.25 ha average in 2010. It will continue to become even smaller.

For these farmers, agricultural incomes are also likely to fall.

Farmer distress has been growing, with the past year witnessing farmers protesting on the streets in several States.

Non-Agricultural jobs to rescue:

According to National Sample Survey (NSS) data, two demographic groups have done reasonably well in labour market outcomes both in terms of job growth as well as wage growth between 2004-5 and 2011-12.

1. the young ones who were getting educated
2. the older ones, (who were poorly educated and landless labour in agriculture) who shifted to non-agricultural jobs especially construction work

However, a big question raises - *Does the economy have the capacity to create non-agricultural jobs for both groups whose numbers will grow over the next decade until 2030?*

- The young have been entering and remaining in education in unprecedented numbers for the last two decades. Hence, the young joining the labour force will indeed grow significantly.
- Also the numbers of landless and small and marginal farmers looking for non-agricultural work is also set to increase.

Construction employment

According to National Sample Survey (NSS) and Labour Bureau data –

- The real net domestic product or the growth rate of the construction sector has steadily increased from 1970s to 2011-12.
- Employment in the construction sector increased 13 times during the past four decades. This led to its share in rural employment rising.
- This sector absorbed 74% of the new jobs created in non-farm sectors in rural areas between 2004-05 and 2011-12.

Note: Number of rural workers in construction is higher as compared to manufacturing or services sectors – because there are fewer skill and educational requirements in construction. This was possible because of the sustained growth in investment in infrastructure, especially over the 11th Five Year Plan period (2007-12) of \$100 billion per annum, two-thirds of which was public, and the remainder private. In addition, there was a real boom in real estate, residential and commercial, throughout the country.

Construction is the main activity absorbing poorly educated rural labour in the rural and urban areas.

However, construction jobs are growing more slowly since 2011-12, **as public investment has fallen**. And with the rising non-performing assets of banks, private investment has fallen as well. The result: fewer workers have been leaving agriculture since 2011-12.

This is hurting landless labour and small and marginal farmers the most, since their households had benefited the most from the tightening of the labour market that had ensued in rural and urban areas because of rising construction jobs.

The way ahead:

The Union government should sustain rural development expenditure, especially for rural roads, under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and rural housing under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban).

The Surface Transport Ministry should also attempt to sustain public investment in infrastructure to generate construction jobs for growing surplus rural labour.

Allocation for investment in infrastructure should be top priority in this Union Budget (which is to be presented on February 1)

Because, investment in infrastructure will open new jobs in non-farm sectors and construction sector – which is vital for addressing rural distress.

The Budget for 2018-19 should sustain this public investment effort. The announcement that the government plans to borrow an additional Rs. 50,000 crore in this financial year, is welcome. Hopefully, the intention here is to raise public investment, especially for infrastructure investment.

Greater construction activities-rural roads, housing and irrigation-will also do a lot to raise rural incomes and jobs and to take the pressure off the farm sector.

Connecting the dots:

- Does the economy have the capacity to create non-agricultural jobs for rural people whose numbers will grow over the next decade until 2030? Examine.
- Critically examine the role of construction sector in addressing rural deprivations.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

Reservation System: Concerns and solution

Background:

The Gujjars in Rajasthan, the Jats in Haryana and the Patels in Gujarat have shown that politically powerful communities nurturing a sense of victimhood can mount a powerful challenge to the Indian state. It shows our incapacity and our growing powerlessness before vested interests that have acted together to take the system in completely different directions”.

Basis of reservations:

The 93rd Constitutional Amendment allows the government to make special provisions for “advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens”, including their admission in aided or unaided private educational institutions.

Article 15(4) of our constitution empowers the government to make special provisions for advancement of backward classes. Similarly, Article 16(4) empowers the state to make special provision for the reservation of appointments of posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which in the opinion of the state are not adequately represented in the services.

Concerns:

- Almost half, and in some instance even more than that, educational and job opportunities in the public sector going to candidates coming under the reserved category has raised concerns.

This is a widely shared feeling across the country by communities feeling marginalised because of policy of reservation which was once limited, focussed as well as necessary but is now spiralling out of control.

- In the constitution is the term 'backward classes defined. What actually constitutes a backward class? What are the determinants of a backward class? These questions remain unanswered and it is only with the help of judicial pronouncements that they have been given some meaning. Question arises how can reservations be made for something that has not been defined?

Way ahead:

What the young are looking for today is not more of the same — admissions to courses that lead to nowhere and low-entry jobs in the government. By empowering them with skills the world needs today and tomorrow, the government will be building the country's human capital far more quickly than any more reservations ever can.

- The vocational training schemes in the country are inadequate and woefully behind the times with many addressing yesterday's needs. There are some good schemes like those offered by the Nettur Technical Training Foundation (NTTF) in Bengaluru but they are simply too few.
- Technical training is also constrained by a small educational base — 70% of India's workforce is without tertiary education — and a crippling lack of well-qualified trainers.

Conclusion:

We have lost more than a decade in not complementing a mass welfare scheme like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) with a bigger programme to train the young for employment. One outcome of such neglect is that there is a clamour for more reservations, often with devastating effects. The government needs to acknowledge and address this soon.

Connecting the dots:

- There have been demands of doing away with the reservation system, in its present form, by various sections of the society. Discuss the reasons behind it. Also, highlight how the issue can be addressed by providing training to the youth for employment.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

Individual rights versus innovation

Introduction:

A committee headed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna, a former Supreme Court judge, has been tasked with making recommendations and drafting a data protection law. The rationale of the committee is “to harness the benefits of the digital economy and mitigate the harms consequent to it”. Since technologies such as Big Data, the Internet of Things, and Artificial Intelligence are here to stay and hold out the promise of welfare and innovation, India will have to develop a data protection law. A white paper has been published by the committee, this gives reason _____ for _____ concern.

Concern:

The broader framing of the document proceeds from a premise of weighing the scales between individual rights and technological innovation. The committee says that we need data protection law to ensure a balance between innovation and privacy. This framing of a trade-off between the demands of technological innovation and individual rights is a terrible bargain for our _____ future. It presumes to hold both fundamental rights and innovation as somewhat equal, or at the very least as competing values. This appears contrary to the principles of individual liberty.

Way ahead:

A data protection law should be guided by following three:

- The right to privacy verdict given by Supreme court in the Puttaswamy case.
- Nine privacy principles proposed by Justice A.P. Shah Committee.
- The data breach alleged with Aadhaar system in place.

The right to privacy judgement:

- The judgment asserts that the right to privacy exists as a natural right inherent in all fundamental rights of the Constitution. At the root of this is the liberty of the individual that finds expression through concepts such as autonomy and dignity — choice and freedom.
- Privacy has positive and negative features, where it restrains “an intrusion upon the life and personal liberty of a citizen”, and also requires “an obligation on the state to take all necessary measures to protect the privacy of the individual”.

The privacy protections that limit state intrusion and data protection laws should shield individuals rather than commercial interests or technological innovation. By avoiding a binary bargain between the benefits of rights and technology, a sound legislation would further innovation as a social goal that serves human needs. It would make big data subject to greater legality, the Internet of Things best suited to the Internet of people, and artificial intelligence subject to natural rights.

Justice A.P. Shah Committee:

The committee proposed nine privacy principles acting on a “fundamental philosophy” of “ensuring that the privacy of the data subject is guaranteed”.

- **Principle of Notice:** A data controller should notify all individuals of its information practices before collecting information from them.
- **Principle of Choice and Consent:** Individuals divulging information must have a choice in the matter. No collection or processing of personal data should take place without consent, with the exception of authorized agencies.
- **Principle of Collection Limitation:** A data controller should collect only as much information as is directly necessary for the purposes identified.
- **Principle of Purpose Limitation:** The collection or processing of information be restricted to only as much information as is adequate and relevant.
- **Principle of Access and Correction:** Data subjects should have access to the data held about them, the ability to seek corrections, amendment, or deletion of such data in case of inaccuracy.
- **Principle of Disclosure of Information:** The data subject (person whose information is taken) has the right to privacy in case their personal information is disclosed to a third party.
- **Principle of Security:** A data controller to ensure the security of the collected personal information by ‘reasonable security standards’ to protect from reasonably foreseeable risks.
- **Principle of Openness:** A data controller to make public all the information it can about the practices, procedures, policies and systems that it implements.

- **Principle of Accountability:** This principle pins accountability on the data controller to comply with measures that fulfil the other eight principles.

Data protection protecting individuals and not about protecting innovation, state interests for welfare objectives, or commercial interests of technologists and corporations.

Recent instances of data breach:

- The Aadhaar project, which aims to usher a data-driven revolution in the private sector and at the same time act as a state policy panacea, has become a topic of public concern. Repeated press reports indicate continuing data breaches, exclusion and theft of benefits, lack of legal remedies and the prospect of profiling and surveillance.

Conclusion:

To forge an understanding, a fundamental acknowledgement has to be that technology is a means, and not the end in itself. It must exist and work within the framework of the rule of law. We need to honour constitutionalism, privileging individual rights over innovation. Data protection legislation should be about protecting people, not innovation.

Connecting the dots:

- A data protection legislation should be about protecting people, not innovation. Analyse.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

Failure of Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication Public Distribution System (PDS)

Background

India's Public Distribution System is one of the largest food distribution network in the world. PDS means distribution of essential commodities to larger section of the society, mostly vulnerable people, through a network of fair Price Shops on a recurring basis.

Established by the Government of India under **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution** and managed jointly with state governments in India, it distributes subsidized food and non-food items to India's poor.

This scheme was launched in India on **June 1997**.

Major commodities distributed include staple food grains, such as wheat, rice, sugar, and kerosene, through a network of fair price shops(also known as ration shops) established in several states across the country.

The state governments can provide subsidies to over and above these items too.

Food Corporation of India (FCI), a Government-owned corporation, procures and maintains the PDS.

The **National Food Security Act** has proposed to make 'Right to Food' through existing Targeted Public Distribution System.

However, there have been many leakages in PDS such as –

- non-inclusion of beneficiaries,
- huge subsidy burden,
- inadequate storage capacities leading to black marketing and hoarding of food grains

To solve this, alternative measures and PDS reforms like cash transfers, Aadhaar-based biometric authentication and food coupons have been initiated by many states.

(The below article examines how far these initiatives and reforms have been successful)

Case study of Jharkhand

Aadhaar-based PDS

Jharkhand government made Aadhaar-based biometric authentication compulsory for PDS users.

Consequences:

- Large numbers of people, especially among vulnerable groups such as widows and the elderly, found themselves excluded from the PDS.
- Those who were still able to buy their food rations faced considerable inconvenience due to connectivity and biometric failures.
- Worse, there was a revival of corruption, as PDS rice meant for those who failed the biometric test was siphoned off with abandon.

The damage was made worse in mid-2017, when the Jharkhand government **mass-cancelled ration cards not linked with Aadhaar**.

- Many of the cancelled ration cards actually belonged to families that had been unable to link their card with Aadhaar for no fault of their own.

- The mass-cancellation of Aadhaar-less ration cards, without verification and without even informing the victims, was both inhuman and illegal.

Jharkhand government launched a further attack on people's food entitlements: the monthly PDS rations of 5 kg per person were restricted to those whose individual names had been linked with Aadhaar in the ration-cards database.

For instance, a family has five members, but only three are listed along with their Aadhaar number in the database, so the family ends up getting 15 kg of rice per month instead of 25 kg. This restriction is a flagrant violation of the instructions issued by the Union Food Ministry.

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) based PDS

Jharkhand government has now decided for transition to "direct benefit transfer"

Under the DBT system, people have to collect their food subsidy in cash from the bank before using it to buy rice from the ration shop at ₹32 per kg. Until now, they were able to buy rice from the ration shop at ₹1 per kg.

The DBT system was initiated in Nagri Block of Ranchi district.

Consequences:

- The new system is a disaster and most people are angry with it.
- The main problem with DBT is that people waste enormous time shuttling between the banks, pragra kendras (common service centres) and ration shops to get hold of their money and then use it to buy rice at the ration shop.

For many of them, this is a three-step process.

1. First, they go to the bank to find out whether the subsidy has been credited and update their passbook.
2. Second, they go to the pragra kendra to withdraw the cash, as the bank often insists on their doing so from these centres.
3. Third, they take the cash to the ration shop to buy rice at ₹32 per kg.

At every step, there are long queues, and for many people the bank or pragra kendra is also far away. For people with mobility problems, like the elderly or disabled, this entire process is a nightmare.

Even as the people of Nagri fume and protest against the DBT experiment, the State government is trying its best to project it as a success and justify its extension to the whole State. If this happens, millions of people will face renewed food insecurity.

Conclusion:

Similar reforms and moves are happening in other States. Most of them are under tremendous pressure from the Central government to impose Aadhaar-based biometric authentication or move towards DBT. **(growing centralisation and technocracy)**

The failures of many districts in different states went largely unreported.

- In Rajasthan, the biometric authentication has caused enormous damage, evident even in the government's own transactions data.
- Even Chhattisgarh, known for its model PDS, is under pressure to follow the diktats of the Central government and adopt Aadhaar-based technology.

The most disturbing aspect of this trend is a lack of concern for the hardships that people face.

- Aadhaar-less ration cards are cancelled without notice.
- Pensions are discontinued without the victims being told what the problem is.
- Job cards are cancelled just to meet the "100% seeding" targets.
- Elderly persons with rough fingerprints are deprived of food rations without compensation.
- Cash payments are automatically redirected to Aadhaar-linked bank accounts that people sometimes know nothing about.

Jean Drèze (Belgian-born Indian development economist and activist) comments -

- In effect, vulnerable people are treated as guinea pigs for undependable technologies, without any effective arrangements for grievance redressal or even information sharing.
- Let people perish if need be, Aadhaar must prevail.

Connecting the dots:

- Insisting on Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication (ABBA) will result into failure of PDS, which is a lifeline for the poor. Critically analyze.
- Growing centralisation and technocracy has become a larger malady in India's social sector. Do you agree? Examine with suitable examples.

TOPIC

General Studies 1:

- *Poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies*

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

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

Climate change: Avoiding the worst case scenario

Background:

The risks of climate change are greater than currently feared.

- A report in the December 2017 issue of the British Journal *Nature* presents a doomsday scenario for the planet by concluding that the rise in average global temperature by the end of the century under the “business as usual scenario” is likely to be about 5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This is off by a huge margin from 2 degrees Celsius scenario which has been considered by the global scientific community as the upper threshold that the Earth’s environment can withstand, beyond which irreversible changes in the global climate are likely to occur.
- In November 2017, a report by the US government, the “Fourth National Climate Assessment” (NCA4), reaffirmed that climate change is “real” and “man-made” and that anthropogenic activities are fundamentally altering the Earth’s environment. It further said that the average global surface temperature has already risen by 1 degrees Celsius since the start of the industrial revolution and could further rise by another 4 degrees Celsius by the end of the century.

Paris agreement:

In December 2015, in a radical departure from the top-down approach to global climate negotiations, 196 parties came together under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to steer the world towards sustainable development by agreeing to limit global average surface temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius above than pre-industrial levels.

Dismal progress:

The progress of the Paris agreement, two years after it was signed and hailed as the “greatest diplomatic success”, has been dismal.

- A study by Climate Tracker shows that no advanced industrial country is on track to meeting its pledges to control greenhouse-gas emissions. Not the EU. Not the US. Not Canada. Not Japan. In fact, global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions continue to rise.
- The World Meteorological Organization says that global emissions reached a record high of 403.3 parts per million (ppm) in 2016, the highest in 800,000 years, and presents a scary picture of irreversible changes already happening in the global climate system.

Way ahead:

Avoiding the climate tipping point requires **unprecedented response at the global level**.

While the 2 degrees Celsius threshold looks unlikely now, we, however, can still minimize its impact while simultaneously developing infrastructure to face the worst scenario.

- First, we need to accept the fact that the status quo is not going to work. We need to fundamentally change our model of development which is based on the excessive resource consumption.

If the same model of development were to continue, it is going to be ecologically unsustainable for the planet.

- We ought to treat the natural environment as a fundamental right and ask politicians to ensure it. Political will flows from the people—when citizens care, politicians too act. While most of us blame lack of a political will for the poor response to climate change, we as citizens have not demanded a measured action from our public representatives.
- In the past, the US helped in shaping the global response to climate change. Now when it has relinquished the global climate leadership by pulling out of the Paris agreement, it seems unlikely that there will be a global agreement now or in the near future. Hence rather than a grand national or global strategy, we need to focus on **regional, national and local strategies, e.g., cities**.
- The global urban population is likely to go up from 54% (3.9 billion) in 2014 to 66% (6.4 billion) in 2050.
- Investing in **energy-efficient appliances**, powering homes with renewable energy, reducing water waste, using public transport and other measures can help in lowering the national, and ultimately the global, carbon profile. **Sharing platforms** like Airbnb, Craigslist and Uber too can help cities in cutting emissions.
- As the impact of climate change becomes increasingly visible, developing countries like India, which are at the risk of facing serious threats due to climate change, need to **focus more on adaptation than mitigation**. They need to develop infrastructure to rehabilitate people in their coastal areas, meet food demand with changing rain patterns and manage immigration caused by climate change.

Positive development:

The sharp fall in renewable energy cost had led to a record renewable capacity addition of 161 gigawatt (GW) in 2016, a 10% rise over 2015. The falling price of renewable energy has made its cost comparable to fossil fuel in many parts of the world. This is likely to accelerate the transition towards a fossil-free future. Already, 47 countries—some of them are among the poorest in the world—are moving towards a fossil-free energy future by 2050.

Conclusion:

As the latest data on GHG emissions shows a continuous growth and the global response to limit these emissions remains lackadaisical, it seems impossible to limit the global average temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius looks over. The only positive thing can be to stabilize the temperature not very far off from the 2 degrees Celsius to avoid catastrophic changes in the global environment.

Connecting the dots:

- Various reports suggest that restricting the limit of increase in global temperature from pre-industrial levels to 2-degree celsius will not be possible because of the business as usual approach. The only positive thing can be to stabilize the temperature not very far off from the 2 degrees Celsius. Suggest measures for the same.

TOPIC:

General Studies 1

- *Population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.*

General Studies 2

- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.*

Family Planning in India: Targeted approach

Introduction:

India in 1952, started the world's first family planning programme. On the whole, these programmes have done well in tackling India's fertility challenge. The recently released report on the fourth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), carried out in 2015-16, shows where it has succeeded—and where shortcomings remain.

Success and failures:

Total fertility rate:

- The total fertility rate has declined to 2.2, marginally above the replacement rate of 2.1. This is substantial progress from 2005-2006 when NFHS-3 pegged the rate at 2.7. There are a number of takeaways from slicing the numbers in different ways.

Geographic variance:

- The fertility rate in 23 states and Union territories—including all the southern states—is below the replacement rate.
- It is substantially higher in a number of states in central, east and north-east India. Bihar, for instance, has the highest rate at 3.41, followed by Meghalaya at 3.04 and Uttar Pradesh and Nagaland at 2.74.

Way ahead:

- The nature and scope of the fertility-related public health challenge facing state governments varies widely. So must the response. The most effective way of enabling this is a **greater role for local bodies** in both urban and rural areas.

Education is a clear differentiator:

- Women with 12 years or more of schooling have a fertility rate of 1.7, while women with no schooling have an average rate of 3.1.
- Education levels are strongly correlated with another important aspect of the fertility rate. Higher levels of schooling mean lower levels of teenage pregnancy. In the 15-19 cohort, as many as one-fifth of the women with no schooling have begun childbearing, while only one in 25 women in the same cohort who have had 12 years or more of schooling have done so. Teenage childbearing, in turn, results in greater health risks. Birth intervals smaller than 24 months “are associated with increased health risks for both mothers and newborns”.

Thus, **lack of education robs women of reproductive control**, feeding into India’s maternal and child health problem. Combined with younger pregnancies and higher childbearing rates, it also constrains women’s economic choices. This, in turn, reinforces a lack of reproductive control—44% of women who are unemployed use modern contraceptives while 60% of women who are employed for cash do so—perpetuating a vicious cycle.

The skewed pattern of contraceptive usage:

- Knowledge of contraceptive methods is now almost universal in India; the government has done well here. Despite this, men have not taken up the responsibility of managing fertility. The most popular contraceptive method by far, at 36%, is female sterilization. Male sterilization—a less invasive and easier method with a much lower chance of medical complications—accounts for a mere 0.3%. Male condom usage is low as well, at 5.6%.
- The public healthcare system, which accounts for almost 70% of modern contraceptive usage, doesn’t do enough to address this problem caused by societal attitudes.

Way ahead:

The targeted approach for fertility management.

- Poorly informed women, largely in rural areas, in order to hit bureaucratic targets, often violate reproductive rights in the process. Thus, Supreme Court in its 2016 verdict in *Devika Biswas vs Union of India & Others*, to call for an end to sterilization camps.

Thus, rather than setting a fertility rate target as done in National Health Policy 2017 we need to have a decentralized planning.

Conclusion:

Almost a century ago, in 1920s, social reformer D Karve took the then radical view that **women could best confront the fertility challenge via emancipation and gender equality**. This continues to hold true today. Successive governments have done well over the decades; NFHS-4 shows improvement in almost all metrics from the 2005-06 NFHS-3. Now, its time the government focuses on enabling educational and economic opportunities for women.

Connecting the dots:

- India launched the world's first family planning programme in 1952. The country has moved ahead with many successes. However, issues like geographic variation in fertility rates etc can be tackled only with decentralised planning and enabling educational and economic opportunities for women. Discuss.

Towards solar-powered agriculture

Introduction:

Renewable energy is now seen as the key electricity supply option, given its rapidly falling costs and its contribution to enhancing energy security at a time of ever-rising fossil fuel imports. Among renewable energy, solar energy is increasingly becoming mainstream due to cost feasibility and higher efficiency. India must exploit the potential of this technology to help farmers meet irrigation needs.

Agricultural areas receive an abundance of sunlight, thus they make fantastic sites for solar power. Masses of unused land is ideal for large solar systems that can offset the burden of a high electricity consumption.

Shift towards solar-powered agriculture

- In the past few years, solar pumps have consistently stimulated the interest of various bureaucrats and politicians.
- There is no shortage of ideas which the Centre, States, civil society organisations, and enterprises are adopting to enhance penetration of solar for irrigation.

For instance,

1. Maharashtra is solarising its agricultural feeders by installing solar power plants at the substation level, through **competitive bidding**.
2. Karnataka is promoting solar pumps for existing grid-connected farmers under a net-metering regime, allowing them to generate additional income by feeding back surplus energy into the grid.
3. In eastern States, GIZ, a German development agency, has piloted community ownership models providing water-as-a-service using solar pumps.

However, there are some concerns:

Despite the diversity of approaches and significant government subsidies, only about 1,42,000 pumps have been deployed till date against a target of one million pumps by 2021.

Majority of the marginal farmers still rely on buying water, the costliest option for irrigation, or on renting pumps to meet their needs.

Such limited demand, in a country with 132 million farmers and 28 million existing irrigation pumps, calls for a reflection on existing deployment approaches.

So, how should India proceed with this impactful technology? What type of deployment approaches should it adopt?

Research studies from Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) highlights the following –

1. The government should target marginal farmers with smaller solar pumps, particularly in areas with good groundwater development potential.
2. Second, government should couple solar pump deployment with micro-irrigation and water harvesting interventions at the farm and community levels.
3. Third, government should focus on technology demonstration and deploy at least five solar pumps in each block of the country.
4. In regions with already good penetration of electric pumps, prefer feeder solarisation through competitive bidding over solarisation of individual pumps.
5. In regions with prevailing local water markets, promote community-owned solar pumps.
6. Encourage sharing of solar pumps among farmers through farmer extension programmes.
7. Provide interest-subsidy to farmers combined with reduced capital subsidy to enable large-scale deployment of solar pumps in a shorter span of time.

Conclusion:

In India, 53% of the net-sown area is still rain-fed. Solar pumps hold potential to enhance irrigation access, advance low-carbon agriculture, reduce the burden of rising electricity subsidies, and improve the resilience of farmers against a changing climate.

The above methods and efforts suggested by CEEW could have a profound effect on farmers' willingness to adopt solar pumps and spur bottom-up demand.

Such an approach would cover a greater number of farmers, helping them reap the benefits of solar pumps sooner, and increase overall returns to the economy.

India must exploit the potential of this decentralised technology to achieve the dual national targets of 100 GW of solar and doubling farmers income by 2022.

Connecting the dots:

- Despite the stimulated interest of various bureaucrats and politicians and significant government subsidies to enhance the penetration of solar for irrigation, its deployment is very poor. Do you agree? Suggest what kind of deployment approaches should the government adopt?

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

ASER 2017: Current challenges in primary education

Introduction:

There is a direct bearing of poor learning outcomes in primary schools on the students' future. The rot in India's primary education is bound to affect the quality of our workforce.

Pratham's latest Annual Survey of Education Report (Aser) 2017, "Beyond Basics", that focuses on students in the **14-18 age group** highlights the following –

- While 86% of adolescents are enrolled in schools, they are under-equipped to contribute to the economy in any meaningful way.
- 25% of the students cannot read a basic text in their own language fluently.
- 40% of 18-year-olds cannot read a simple sentence in English.
- And most of them lack basic arithmetic skills; only 43% of them could perform a simple division.
- More girls than boys drop out of school between ages 14-18. While boys drop out to work, girls usually stay at home and help with domestic chores.

All these translates to unacceptable performance in everyday tasks, such as - calculating time, applying the unitary method, comprehending the instructions written on a pack of oral rehydration solution etc.

Concerns:

India has achieved universal enrolment at the elementary level. This is a great achievement, but getting students to school is only the beginning of human capital formation. **Learning requires a lot more than attendance.**

In order for students to stay in school, the **school needs to create a noticeable difference in the students' abilities.**

The drop in the enrolment rate in secondary education (78.5%), despite the high returns to education, shows that something is wrong in our quality of instruction.

Performance of private unaided schools better than government schools

- The ASER report highlighted that - Private unaided schools have much better learning outcomes per unit of expenditure.
- Contrary to popular opinion, most private unaided schools are inexpensive; 80% of them charge a fee that is lower than the government's per-pupil expenditure (PPE).
- In terms of learning outcomes, both private and government schools performed poorly, but private schools perform better.
- Private unaided schools are delivering the same, if not better, learning outcomes than government schools at a fraction of the cost, despite resource constraints.

This shows that **more inputs do not translate into better outputs.** Despite qualified teachers, mid-day meals and free admissions, 13 million students left government schools between 2011 and 2016, while private school enrolment increased by 17 million in that duration.

Clearly, people are choosing private schools for their better service.

What implications does this have for India's education policy?

- For starters, the government needs to acknowledge the fact that "unrecognized" private unaided schools play an important role.
- The Right to Education Act stipulates that private schools cannot be established or continue to function without obtaining a "certificate of recognition" from the state government, i.e. until they meet stipulated norms such as the maximum pupil-teacher-ratio and infrastructure. This has made many schools economically unviable and forced them to shut down.

Given that millions of students have left government schools for private ones, the government should support their education by giving school vouchers to all underprivileged students. The students can choose to spend the voucher in their government school, or give it to a private school. This will increase the purchasing power of all parents and allow them to send their child to school for more years, or send them to a better school.

Better managed schools will attract more students and expand, while poorly performing schools will shrink.

The increasing number of government schools that are emptying-out, but continue to drain resources, will have to improve their performance or they might cease to exist.

Policies such as free bicycles to girls in Bihar have been successful in increasing enrolment by improving mobility. Building gender-specific toilets in schools is another measure that helps in improving girls' enrolment.

As a welcome move, the upcoming New Education Policy is likely to focus more on outcomes than inputs.

Conclusion:

2018 will be a historic year for Indian education policy. The **Kasturirangan Committee** is expected to release the New Education Policy, outlining the principles, policies and, perhaps, specific programmes and pilots that will guide education delivery in the country.

An educated citizenry is vital for a democracy. If our education system does not enable people to comprehend the written word, keep stable jobs and participate in reasonable debates, it is a problem that needs immediate redressal.

While the Aser report does not paint a favourable picture of the quality of the present workforce, education reforms can change the situation for the next generation.

Connecting the dots:

- Despite the stimulated interest of various bureaucrats and politicians and significant government inputs to enhance the enrollments in primary and secondary education, its enrollment is very poor. Do you agree? Suggest what kind of implications does this have for India's education policy?

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

Allowing Cross-practice

What is cross-practise?

Cross practicing is when a homeopath or an ayurved uses allopathic drug and vice versa.

In news:

The National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2017 attempts to revamp the medical education system in India to ensure an adequate supply of quality medical professionals. Section 49(4) of the bill proposes a joint sitting of the Commission, the Central Council of Homoeopathy and the Central Council of Indian Medicine. This sitting may decide on 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.

Debate:

- Questions regarding the ability of Ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and homoeopathy (AYUSH) practitioners to cross-practise has been highlighted.
- Currently there exists restrictions on allopathic practitioners from practising higher levels of caregiving.

Rationale behind allowing cross-practicing:

Primary health system is struggling with a below-par national physician-patient ratio (0.76 per 1,000 population, amongst the lowest in the world). This is due to-

- Paucity of MBBS-trained primary-care physicians.
- Unwillingness of existing MBBS-trained physicians to serve remote/rural populations.

Urban-rural disparities in physician availability in the face of an increasing burden of chronic diseases make health care in India both inequitable and expensive.

Need for trained cadre:

There is an urgent need for a trained cadre to provide-

- Accessible primary-care services that cover minor ailments.
- Health promotion services.
- Risk screening for early disease detection.
- Appropriate referral linkages.

Thereby ensuring that people receive care at a community level when they need it.

Basis on which AYUSH physicians can be allowed to cross-prescribe:

- The practice of using AYUSH physicians as medical officers in guideline-based national health programmes exists already.
- Location-specific availability of this cadre can ensure uninterrupted care provision in certain resource-limited settings.
- Their current academic training has primed them for cross-disciplinary learning.

Need for capacity building:

The National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 calls for multi-dimensional mainstreaming of AYUSH physicians.

There were 7.7 lakh registered AYUSH practitioners in 2016, according to National Health Profile 2017 data.

- The 2013 Shailaja Chandra report on the status of Indian medicine and folk healing, commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, noted several instances in States where National Rural Health Mission-recruited AYUSH physicians were the **sole care**

providers in PHCs. The report called for the appropriate skilling of this cadre to meet the demand for acute and emergency care at the primary level.

- The 4th Common Review Mission Report 2010 of the National Health Mission reports the utilisation of AYUSH physicians as medical officers in primary health centres (PHCs) in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand as a human resource rationalisation strategy. While the supply of AYUSH physicians was high in many instances, a lack of appropriate training in allopathic drug dispensation acts as a deterrent to their utilisation in primary-care settings.

Way forward:

- Deploying a capacity-building strategy using AYUSH physicians upskilled through a bridge-training programme
- Use of evidence-based protocols, supported by technology, to deliver quality, standardised primary health care to rural populations.
- Efforts to gather evidence on the capacity of licensed and bridge-trained AYUSH physicians to function as primary-care physicians have been under way in diverse field settings.

A structured, capacity-building mechanism is the next logical step.

The Maharashtra government has led the way in implementing bridge training for capacity-building of licensed homoeopathy practitioners to cross-prescribe.

As anchors:

- Capacity-building of licensed AYUSH practitioners through bridge training to meet India's primary care needs is only one of the multi-pronged efforts required to meet the objective of achieving universal health coverage set out in NHP 2017.
- Capacity-building of other non-MBBS personnel such as nurses, auxiliary nurse midwives and rural medical assistants, thereby creating a cadre of mid-level service providers.

They can act as anchors for the provision of comprehensive primary-care services at the proposed health and wellness centres.

Conclusion:

In the long run, a pluralistic and integrated medical system for India can surely help in effective primary-care delivery and prevention of chronic and infectious diseases.

Connecting the dots:

What do you understand by the term "cross-practice"? Discuss the issues surrounding it. Should it be allowed in India. Give your rationale.

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, Education, Human Resources.*
- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes*

Choosing “Institutions of Eminence”**Background:**

Last August, the Union government invited universities across India to apply to be chosen as “Institutions of Eminence”. Successful applicants would be exempted from the oversight of the University Grants Commission; and provided a handsome subsidy of Rs 1,000 crore each. The idea was to nurture Indian universities fit to be placed in the “top five hundred of any world renowned ranking frameworks (such as the Times Higher Education World University Rankings)”.

In the 21st century, more than ever, knowledge shall be the key to economic and social progress. That is why we should welcome the government’s “Institutions of Eminence” scheme.

Global universities vis-a-vis India universities:

In the 1970s, Chinese universities had been destroyed by the Cultural Revolution. The universities in South Korea and Singapore were utterly mediocre. Those in Japan were constrained by their lack of English proficiency. Many Chinese and Korean universities today rank higher than Indian universities, which would not have been the case in the 1970s and 1980s. In recent decades, while public universities in other Asian countries have perceptively improved, those in India have noticeably declined.

Reasons behind decline in quality of Indian universities:

- The elevation of quantity over quality
- The contempt for scholarship and research among our political and bureaucratic elite.
- The fact that the choice of vice-chancellors and IIT directors is not left to academics themselves but directed by political calculations.
- The autonomy of our leading educational institutions has been gravely corroded over the year with the HRD ministers of all parties seeking to place, at the head of universities and research institutes, their own people rather than those best qualified for the job.
- The catchment area of faculty and students is restricted to a single city or state.

- Professors impose their own intellectual frameworks on students rather than exposing them to competing theoretical approach.
- The pressures of identity politics exist.
- Universities have excessive dependence on state funding.

Thus, In India pluralism is undermined by narrow-mindedness:

The best universities practise five kinds of pluralism:

- They offer undergraduate and graduate courses in diverse disciplines.
- They expose students to different theoretical frameworks in each discipline.
- They recruit faculty from across the country and from all social groups.
- They attract students of diverse backgrounds.
- They attract private as well as public funding.

Selecting “Institutions of Eminence”:

As many as one hundred institutions have applied for the tag, including seven IITs, DU, IISc, as well as new private universities such as Ashoka. Each applicant has submitted a 15-year “vision plan” explaining how it shall break into the list of the top 500 universities in the world. From this large pool, 20 institutions — 10 public, 10 private — will be chosen by a so-called “**Empowered Experts Committee**”. The committee’s members will be reputed and credible individuals who have contributed to education, other public issues, economic growth and social development for a minimum period of ten years. They should have had an exceptional and untarnished record in their respective fields of excellence, and an incontrovertible and demonstrated commitment to public causes. For this Expert Committee to indeed be credible it must have real, independent, experts in the field of education and research.

Conclusion:

The idea of having Institutions of Excellence is excellent in itself; however, its credibility shall rest on the manner in which the “Empowered Experts Committee” is constituted and goes about its work. Serious scholars who have themselves nurtured institutions of quality are far better qualified than party hacks or career bureaucrats to judge which Indian universities do (and do not) have the potential to become world-class.

Connecting the dots:

- The government has envisaged choosing few of the Indian universities as "institutions of eminence". Discuss the idea behind the scheme. Also discuss the role of the empowered experts committee.

- Indian universities have been marred with narrow-mindedness while the best universities across the world practices pluralism in disciplines, faculty, students, funding etc. 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:

- *Infrastructure – Roads*

The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2017: Rectifying systemic issues

Introduction:

The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha in 2017. The bill if made a law would be first of its kind to extensively reform existing legislation on road safety, the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. The Amendment Bill is robust and rectifies several systemic issues by providing for a uniform driver licensing system, protection of children and vulnerable road users, rationalising penalties, and much more.

Going digital:

The World Health Organisation (WHO) points out that for effective road safety management, it is imperative to have an institutionalised and sustainable data system. This includes information pertaining to drivers, such as types of licences held and a record of violation of traffic laws.

Issue:

The driver licensing system in India controls and filters the number and quality of drivers on the road. Currently, the procedure is largely manual, while the number of licences issued per year is over a crore.

- The inefficiencies of a predominantly manual system, given the scale of licences issued every year, results in lakhs of licences being issued without the prescribed checks and balances.
- In the absence of a central registry, often multiple licences are held by one person for different States.
- Low penalties for licensing offences allow erring drivers to be behind the wheel and get away with life-threatening violations.

Provision in the bill:

The Bill addresses each of the above challenges by introducing technology in the licensing procedure.

- A digitised, uniform and centralised driver licensing system will go a long way in ensuring ease of access, efficiency and transparency in the filtering process.
- The Bill also proposes to introduce digitisation in the monitoring and enforcement of traffic laws.

Example: Kerala

- Electronic monitoring and enforcement can already be seen in practice in Kerala. The State has a 'city surveillance and traffic monitoring system', and automated traffic enforcement systems to detect traffic light violations as well as speeding. The enactment of the Bill will facilitate the replication and creation of such digitised systems for all other States.

Children in focus:

Issue:

- Since 2008, in India, over 55,000 children have lost their lives in road accidents. In 2016 alone, 7% of road crash deaths were attributed to children below 18 years. The WHO asserts that using child-restraint systems in vehicles decreases the risk of death in a crash by about 70% for infants and 54-80% for small children.
- In the current piece of legislation, there is no provision for protection of children, and this lacuna has been addressed for the first time.

Provision in the bill:

The Bill proposes to mandate the use of protective headgear by every person above the age of four driving, riding or being carried on a two-wheeler. It provides for measures to be laid down for the safety of children below the age of four. Similarly, the Bill mandates the use of safety belts and child restraints for those under 14 years and introduces a fine of Rs. 1,000 for the driver or guardian for the violation of the same.

Increased penalties:

Issue:

For decades, penalties for behaviour that results in fatalities and grievous injuries have remained minimal, largely unrevised, and, consequently, have failed to deter violators.

Provision in the bill:

This Bill promises to rationalise these fines. For instance-

- The penalty for drunk driving has been increased to Rs. 10,000 for the first offence and Rs. 15,000 for the subsequent one.

- For exceeding lawful speeds, the penalty has been increased to Rs. 1,000 for light motor vehicles and Rs. 2,000-4,000 for medium and heavy motor vehicles.
- For the non-use of helmets and seat belts, the fines have been increased from Rs. 100 to Rs. 1,000.

Conclusion:

As a signatory to the **Brasilia Declaration on Road Safety**, India has committed to reducing, by 2020, the number of road crash fatalities and serious injuries by 50%. This will be impossible to achieve if the sole statute governing road safety in India, the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, is not overhauled. The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2017, will serve as the first and most essential step towards fulfilling this vision.

Connecting the dots:

- The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 needs overhauling. 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, Education, Human Resources.*

Focusing on Rural Education

Introduction:

An amazing transformation has occurred in the course of a generation. Young men and women in rural India are far surpassing their parents' levels of education. As late as 2001, only a little over 25% of all rural 18-year-olds were attending schools, the rest having dropped out earlier. By 2016, the share of 18-year-olds in schools and colleges had gone up to 70%. There is a rapidly rising trend of education in rural India.

The ASER Survey:

- It is derived from an innovative survey of more than 30,000 youth, in the age group of 14-18, that was conducted in 1,641 villages of 24 states in India.
- This survey is important because more than 125 million individuals are in this age group, of whom more than two-thirds, roughly 85 million live in rural India, a population the size of

Germany or the UK. They are the ones on whom their families' hopes are vested, the future of the nation.

Optimistic findings:

- Larger and larger numbers of individuals in the age group of 14-18 are opting to remain in the educational system.
- Girls have closed the gap with boys in rural areas: at age 14, 94% of girls and 95% of boys are enrolled in school; by age 18, 68% of girls and 72% of boys are still in school, a wholesale improvement on the proportions of a generation earlier.

Dismal quality of education in rural schools:

- Among 14-18-year-olds surveyed by the ASER teams, only 43% could solve a class IV mathematics problem.
- This proportion was roughly the same among 14-year-olds as among 18-year-olds, showing that the problem of low learning outcomes was not resolved by remaining in school.
- Only 40% of 18-year-olds could take 10% off a given number. More than that percentage could not locate their state on a map of India.
- Twenty-seven percent of 14-year-olds, and 21% of 18-year-olds could not read a class II textbook in the regional language, and more than 40% in each age group could not read a simple sentence in English.

Modern economic growth has little room for people with rudimentary skills and low education levels. The age of assembly-line production has given way to newer technologies, with complex processes, requiring a better trained workforce.

Consequence:

Young people trained in this shabby manner would find it very difficult when it would come to searching jobs. They won't be able to cover the learning deficits that have accumulated from years of attending low-quality rural schools. The belief that education will be the road out of precarious livelihood on the farm has gained ground. Inspired by this hope, parents are sending their children to schools in rural India. Most of them are first-generation learners. Soon, however, this younger generation will be graduating from high schools and colleges—and then they will find that there are very few good jobs. A reaction against such sort of education would be- “When my first-born was unable to make much of his 16 years of education,” a parent might argue, “why should I waste time and money on the education of my second-born?” With **mass disappointment**, the rising trend of education is going to fall.

Issues:

- The market for education performs poorly in situations where information flows are sparse and competition is limited or non-existent. Privatizing the government system is not a viable solution, either. Rural private schools perform no better than rural public schools in terms of learning outcomes.
- Broken governance system- There are few rewards for being a good teacher and few punishments for being a careless one. That is because of faulty designs which need to be repaired or replaced with more effective and accountable governance systems.

Conclusion:

A highly regimented and top-down system currently exists in India. It needs to give way to another system in which **teachers are innovative in the classroom and parents are involved as co-decision-makers**. Smaller-scale innovations developed by state governments and non-government organizations show the huge potential of societal innovation. These reform efforts should serve as the starting points for a broader and increasingly essential public conversation.

Raising the quality of education in rural schools is essential, and a nationwide dialogue is necessary for charting the way ahead. Business-as-usual will not fix the problem.

Connecting the dots:

- The rural education is in a dismal state as per the latest ASER survey. This will have grim consequences on overall education in India. It's time the existing system is overhauled. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 1:

- *Urbanization, problems and remedies*

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

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

Clean mobility in India

Background:

The year 2017 turned out to be a landmark one for the idea of clean mobility in India.

- The Government announced a 2030 timeline to stop sale of fossil fuel-powered vehicles in favour of electric vehicles.
- The Supreme Court put on hold the sale of vehicles running on BS-III emission standards.

Transport continues to be a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and health experts have long been underlining its impact on air quality. Transport activity will continue to grow, making it important to phase-in a mobility system that is clean, sustainable and health-friendly.

Policy measures:

- Policy measures must include major incentives, not just for clean energy transport providers but also for commuters.
- At the same time the Government must expand its vision to include a larger bunch of green transport options.
- Budget 2018 must incentivise R&D in electric vehicles; announce schemes to improve public transport in polluted cities; and provide the necessary push towards building sustainable infrastructure for cycle users.

Key focus areas:

Long-term support to electric vehicle manufacturers:

Announcing a timeline is not enough. The Government must also look at following-

- Incentivising private companies to invest more in R&D.
- The possibility of offering tax breaks to manufacturing units that produce electric vehicles.
- Creating 'special zones' for such plants is another lucrative option. The UK is putting in place a £400 million Charging Investment Infrastructure Fund for this, comprising a £200 million investment by the government matched by an equal investment by the private sector. The Indian government must consider a similar exercise.

Augmenting infrastructure:

The Government recently announced that Rs. 7 lakh crore worth of roads and highways will be constructed. Budget 2018 should fast-track these projects. Better roads will have a multiplier effect on several sectors.

- The infrastructural boost must also include a thrust on making the country EV-friendly. For instance, Europe has stipulated regulations, requiring 10 per cent of parking spaces in new buildings to have recharging facilities by 2023. Every new or refurbished house in will also need to be equipped with an EV recharging point.
- The Budget must set out plans to partner private players for the purpose of putting in place charging stations.

Rewarding clean commuters :

Countries like Belgium, Luxembourg and France are actually paying their citizens for cycling to work. The mode of rewards includes cycling reimbursements based on kilometres cycled, income tax breaks for buying bikes or mobility vouchers. In another interesting global example, Scotland offers interest-free loans to buyers of electric cars, in a bid to bring about a mass change in consumer behaviour. Fiscal incentives can also be considered for major Indian cities to encourage people to turn to clean mobility options.

Giving cycling its due in the urban infrastructure:

A study of bus commuters in Delhi found that around 7 per cent of commuters had total trip lengths of less than 5 km. Similarly, another study found that as many as 80 per cent of bus commuters owned cycles but very few of them used them to reach bus stops; they walked or hired a short distance commute vehicle. These commuters are an important group of potential cyclists, and can actively take to cycling if provided safe riding lanes and parking spaces.

- Countries like Netherlands and Denmark have championed the cause cycling by making it safe and comfortable. The urban infrastructure in these countries gives priority to cyclists through measures like dedicated cycling lanes, extensive parking for bicycles and integration with public transport.
- In India, bicycles can become an important mode of last-mile connectivity in cities where people have to cover significant distances to their homes or offices after stepping out of public transport.

Incentivise investment in R&D for e-bikes:

The market for electric bicycles (e-bikes) is in a nascent stage in India. However, e-bikes can play a significant role on Indian roads. Though there has been remarkable progress in product innovation and quality enhancement in making e-bikes user-friendly and durable in recent years, more needs to be done.

- Need to improve battery technology as well as technology for engines and body of vehicles to increase efficiency.
- Manufacturers investing in e-bikes and electric pedal assisted cycles (Epac) technology must be offered tax breaks and policy support to enable them make more efficient and affordable products.

Connecting the dots:

- Transport continues to be a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and health experts have long been underlining its impact on air quality. Thus, the Government must expand its vision to include a larger bunch of green transport options. Discuss.

- On urban transport is dependent its economy and more than the well-being of the urbanites. This makes it important to phase-in a mobility system that is clean, sustainable and health-friendly. Discuss

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

State funding of elections

Background:

Indian elections are the world's biggest exercise in democracy but also among the most expensive.

Parties and candidates need large sums of money for voter mobilisation, advertising, consulting, transport, propaganda and printing of campaign materials to reach voters in constituencies. Corporate donations constitute the main source of election funding in India which is mainly the black money, with business and corporate donations to political parties commonly taking this form. The public disclosure system that exists is limited.

Best practices elsewhere:

India's privately funded election campaign stands in contrast to the trend in most countries. Partial or full public funding or transparent regulation and financial accountability of political finance exists in many countries as in the U.S.

Issues:

- Corruption in election finance and the flawed party funding system drive political parties to misuse government's discretionary powers to raise funds for election campaigns. The combined effect is the absence of a level playing field which has reduced the effectiveness of our democracy.
- Absence of transparency in funding- Even 70 years after Independence the country had not been able to evolve a transparent method of funding political parties which is vital to the system of free and fair elections.

Issues with electoral bonds:

- Anybody can buy electoral bonds in the form of bearer bonds and donate it anonymously to a political party of their choice. All donations given to a party will be accounted for in the balance sheets but without exposing the donor details to the public. Donors continue to prize anonymity as they fear disclosure could invite adverse consequences from political opponents. As a result, the Election Commission (EC), the Income Tax department and the voter would remain in the dark about it.
- Bonds will allow corporate houses to make anonymous donations through banking channels to the party of their choice. This would lead to further opacity in the funding process and further limit oversight and accountability.
- The bonds scheme imposes no restrictions on the quantum of corporate donations. Consequently, electoral bonds cannot address the problems that arise from the corporate control over politics and corporate capture of government policies and decisions.
- Electoral bonds will result in unlimited and undeclared funds going to certain political parties which will be shielded from public scrutiny as the balance sheets will not show which party has been the beneficiary of this largesse.

Far from reducing the large-scale corporate funding of elections, the introduction of electoral bonds does not even address this issue. Anonymity is perhaps one of the biggest threats to our democracy today; it is the very wellspring of institutionalized corruption.

Three steps back:

- Lifting of the maximum limit of 7.5% on the proportion of the profits a company can donate to a political party, thus opening up the possibility of shell companies being set up specifically to fund parties.
- Amendment of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) opening the floodgates of foreign funding to political parties, especially those which have a foreign support base.
- The refusal of political parties to come under the RTI Act in order to conceal their sources of funding.

III-Consequences:

- The above three things will end up strengthening the business-politics nexus. It goes against the position taken by various electoral reform committees that the existing pattern of political funding encourages lobbying and capture of the government by big donors.
- Far from making the funding process transparent, the bond scheme could provide a backdoor to corporates and other lobbies for shaping public policy to benefit their interests. There is thus a legitimate fear that policy decisions of political parties and politicians after being elected may be biased in favour of groups that fund them.
- Moreover, these bonds are likely to reverse the small steps towards transparency of political finance that came as a result of RTI-driven public disclosure of income tax returns

of political parties arguing that these disclosures were a matter of public interest and should be available to citizens. Proposed amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act will exempt parties from keeping records of donations made through bonds.

- The decision to reduce cash contributions from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 2,000 is a step in the right direction, but the net effect is debatable, since it could prompt parties to take smaller cash donations, and therefore not declare their source.
- The Association for Democratic Reforms found that nearly 70% of party funding over an 11-year period came from unknown sources; nearly Rs. 7,900 crore donations came from unknown sources in 2015-2016. Electoral bonds will not change this.

Reducing the high cost of elections:

- Elections that work well are essential for democracy; conversely, money power can corrode the entire process. A major concern associated with the high cost of elections is that it prevents political parties and candidates with modest financial resources from being competitive in elections.
- A number of government committees have outlined reform proposals to contain the negative effects of the high cost of elections. These include strong disclosure norms, strict statutory limits on election expenses and ceiling on corporate donations to political parties. The rules to limit and restrict the campaign expenditure of parties are largely inoperative because it is easy to circumvent them.

Solution:

State funding of elections (in various forms) is a potential solution to this problem. The **Indrajit Gupta Committee** on State Funding of Elections had endorsed partial state funding of recognised political parties and their candidates in elections way in 1998. The government needs to show political will to have a discussion on state funding of elections. The mechanics of this process need to be carefully worked out to establish the allocation of money to national parties, State parties and independent candidates, and to check candidate's own expenditure over and above that which is provided by the state.

Conclusion:

A formula that is both efficient and equitable can be formulated based on the experiences of other countries which have state funding of elections. This is required to ensure that democracy works for everyone and not just for the wealthy few.

Connecting the dots:

- Indian elections are the world's biggest exercise in democracy but also, among the most expensive. Discuss the issues. How electoral bonds falls short to solve the issue. What should be the way ahead.

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.*

General Studies 3:

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

Formalization of Indian Economy

Background:

The new Economic Survey written by the team of finance ministry economists led by Arvind Subramanian provides compelling evidence of how the Indian economy is becoming more formalized.

The reason this shift is important is not just because of the possibility of higher tax revenues for the government to spend; it is also about the social contract between citizens and the state.

Key shifts:

There are four key shifts that are mentioned in the Economic Survey 2017-18.

- The introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) has brought more firms into the tax net.
The number of enterprises paying indirect taxes has gone up by 3.4 million, an increase of 50%.
- Only around a quarter of the 240 million Indian working outside farms file their income tax returns.
Demonetization done in November 2016 seems to have led to a statistically significant increase in the number of new income tax filers.
- The Indian workforce is more formalized than most people believed till recently. Nearly a third of the non-farm Indian workforce of 240 million has some social security coverage.
And more than half of the non-farm workforce is employed in firms that now pay taxes.

- Indians are putting a greater proportion of their savings in the formal financial sector. Bank deposits swelled after November 2016. The booming stock market has also made financial savings through mutual funds more attractive compared to gold or real estate. These four shifts—more firms paying indirect taxes, more individual filing income tax returns, a big increase in the proportion of formal jobs and the increase in savings in the formal financial sector—can have profound effects on the Indian economy if they are sustained.

Methodological innovations:

Much of the data offered by the finance ministry comes from the GST system, rather than from surveys. The mining of GST data is part of the welcome introduction of Big Data into Indian policy discourse. The Economic Survey released a year ago had similarly used Big Data and satellite images to estimate issues as diverse as interstate migration to the extent of Indian urbanization. The finance ministry economists deserve kudos for their methodological innovations.

What does such an overdue shift to formal economic activity potentially mean?

The Indian nation state sits on a very weak fiscal base. It is neither able to invest in national security or provide public goods or create a social security system without running up destabilizing fiscal deficits.

- India has a tax-to-GDP ratio that is broadly similar to what other countries had at a similar stage of development. The question is whether that ratio can be increased as India gets richer, which is difficult unless more economic activity moves into the formal sectors. This is possible only once the economy is formalised.
- More direct tax payments by individuals as well as enterprises will not only create fiscal space for lower GST rates but also provide incentives for citizens to demand better governance.

Conclusion:

The process of formalization needs to be accelerated further.

Connecting the dots:

- The Economic Survey highlights how Indian economy is undergoing formalization. Discuss how this change can be accelerated further.

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.*

Section 124-A of IPC: To repeal or not to?

Introduction:

Section 124-A in the Indian Penal Code, named 'Sedition', says 'Whoever, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government established by law in India' shall be punished with life imprisonment

History of Sedition law:

- The law was originally drafted by Thomas Macaulay
- It was not a part of IPC in the 1860s and was even dropped from the law. It was introduced in the IPC in the year 1870
- Many Indian freedom fighters, including Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, were charged with sedition during freedom struggle

While the constitution was in making:

- Part III of the Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights to citizens and non-citizens. No fundamental right is absolute. Freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) can be reasonably restricted on the grounds specified in Article 19(2).
- In the Draft Constitution, one of the heads of the restrictions proposed on freedom of speech and expression was "sedition". K M Munshi opposed the inclusion of "sedition" in the Draft Constitution as a restriction on freedom of speech and expression. During the debates in the Constituent Assembly, in view of the bitter experience of the arbitrary application of the sedition law by the colonial regime against nationalist leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru amongst others, agreed with Munshi and deliberately **omitted "sedition" as one of the permissible grounds of restriction under Article 19(2)**. However, **sedition remained a criminal offence in the IPC Section 124-A** and provides inter alia for the sentence of life imprisonment and fine upon conviction.

Supreme Court judgements:

- **Kedernath vs. State of Bihar, 1962-** The Court ruled that mere criticism of the government or comments on the administration — however vigorous, pungent or ill-informed — was not sedition and that incitement to violence is the essential ingredient of that offence.

- **In 1995-** Certain persons were sought to be prosecuted for sedition for shouting slogans like Khalistan Zindabad and raj karega khalsa. The SC held that the casual raising of such slogans a couple of times by the individuals did not tantamount to sedition and therefore Section 124-A could not be invoked.
- **Nazir Khan vs. State of Delhi, 2003-** The SC made the following significant observations: “It is the fundamental right of every citizen to have his own political theories and ideas and to propagate them and work for their establishment so long as he does not seek to do so by force and violence or contravene any provision of law”.

What does this mean?

The legal position which emerges is that merely shouting slogans like Pakistan or Khalistan zindabad, however deplorable, per se would not attract Section 124-A which deals with sedition.

Criticism of the SC judgment upholding the conviction of Afzal Guru also would not attract Section 124-A.

However if a person has said “Hindustan murdabad”, or that the Indian state is tyrannical and it is necessary to overthrow it, that could possibly amount to sedition.

Issue:

Section 124-A has often been misused by ill-informed and over enthusiastic prosecuting agencies who are against any criticism of the government.

- Kanhaiya Kumar, Patidar leader Hardik Patel were slapped with sedition charges in past.
- In the year 2014, some of the Kashmiri students were charged with sedition for supporting Pakistan in a cricket match between India and Pakistan.

Repeal or not to repeal:

- The remedy does not lie in repealing Section 124-A. As there is no statutory provision which cannot be misused. Misuse of Section 124-A in some cases, however regrettable, is no ground for its deletion.
- The provision properly interpreted and correctly applied protects and preserves the integrity of the Indian state and is also a deterrent for persons who are minded to commit acts of incitement to violence and acts which cause disturbance of public order.

Connecting the dots:

- Section-124A has been one of the most misused legal provision. Discuss the historical background and issues associate with it. Should t be repealed or not? Analyze.

INTERNATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

Re-Engaging India and Pakistan

Intellectual partition: Background

While the two countries had been physically partitioned before, the 'intellectual partition' of India and Pakistan is now taking place. The "intellectual and emotional partition" of the two countries is more stark today. Indian and Pakistani societies have learnt to look away from each other culturally. Pakistani students learn a language more Arabic than Urdu, of a polity that begins in 1947, and about an ancient history that relates to foreign invaders from the country's west more than the shared history with its east. On the Indian side, contemporary cultural linkages have been severed, with Abida Parveen and Ghulam Ali no longer able to perform in India, Pakistani actors barred from work in Indian films, and a television network stopping the very popular telecast of Pakistani soap operas. Sporting events are fewer, and there is little "healthy rivalry" when Indian and Pakistani teams do meet: instead a defeat becomes a national disgrace, while a victory is celebrated as a quasi-military conquest. Visas are still granted for pilgrimages on both sides, but for all other travel they are tightly controlled and granted as exceptions to the rule.

Bilateral trade- At risk

- Bilateral trade, which had developed a low but steady normal, could be reduced even further now: as Indian development of Chabahar port in Iran circumvents Pakistan by sea, and an air cargo corridor to Afghanistan replaces land cargo entirely.
- Pakistan is willing to risk its trade route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, but won't allow Indian trade to Afghanistan come through Wagah.

Increasing ceasefire violations:

- 'Trading fire' at the Line of Control (LoC) has increased, where Pakistan attempts to push in infiltrators over the LoC into India under covering fire, and Indian troops fire back, taking also a high toll for civilians on both sides.
- After the 2003 ceasefire had been implemented, villagers on either side of the LoC had returned to their homes and rebuilt schools along the area. Most of that peace has been undone by the past few years of ceasefire violations.
- From 12 ceasefire violations (CFVs) on both sides combined and one civilian casualty in 2006, 2016 saw 51 dead in about 900 CFVs.

On Terrorism: The discourse on terrorism is even more divided.

- After the Mumbai attacks of 2008, Pakistan admitted in public statements at least that the perpetrators of the attacks would be brought to justice. Yet in the past three years, the Mumbai trial in Rawalpindi has all but ground to a halt.
- The Lashkar-e-Taiba's operations commander Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi is out on bail.
- 26/11 mastermind Hafiz Saeed, out of custody last month, plans to stand for elections in 2018 in Pakistan.
- On the Pakistani side, there's growing belief that India funds groups such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as well as insurgent groups in Balochistan.

Re-engaging: A necessity

While both India and Pakistan have recently appointed new High Commissioners to Islamabad and Delhi, respectively, there is very little hope of any fresh initiative at this point. It is necessary for both sides to stem the intellectual partition as:

- India has long opposed "third-party interventions", but the lack of dialogue with Pakistan is imposing just that, with every dispute between the two countries now being taken up at global forums: the United Nations, Financial Action Task Force, International Court of Justice, and World Bank for the Indus Waters Treaty.
- With the U.S. drawing India into its Afghanistan policy, and China's stakes in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the subcontinent is becoming an area of contestation by players bigger than both India and Pakistan.
- Even in Afghanistan, their interests are being increasingly defined by the coalitional arcs being drawn: with the U.S., India, and Afghanistan ranged on one side; and Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and the Taliban on the other.
- India's decision to stay out of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meet in Pakistan has complicated its standing as a regional leader. While alternative arrangements such as The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) initiative and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) represent some parts of the region, they cannot

replace the whole, and the region becomes easier to fragment, as China has managed to do by making inroads into Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

- The growing distance between the people of both countries will be much more difficult for their governments to bridge in the future.

Conclusion:

The two sides can explore simple engagements on the environment, medical tourism, energy pipelines and electric grids in the interim. In a world where connectivity is the new currency, and multiple alignments are replacing polar geopolitics, it is hard to justify the disconnected space between New Delhi and Islamabad.

Connecting the dots:

- India and Pakistan are going intellectual partition today. Discuss why is it important for the two countries to sort out the issues mutually.

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*

Financial security for poor and the elderly

Background:

India is home to one-fifth of the world's population which includes a third of the world's poor and one-eighth of the world's elderly. Several million of them who spend their whole lives as informal workers have no retirement security other than the hope that their children will care for them in their old age. This arrangement worked well as long as the joint family structure was the dominant characteristic of Indian society. However, with new social norms eroding the family-based system of support, old-age care for low-income citizens has become a critical challenge.

With poor financial literacy, these people face considerable challenges in making decisions for retirement planning.

Societal change:

India is experiencing a demographic transition leading to lower fertility, increased life expectancy, and a consequent increase in the proportion of the elderly.

- Families are shrinking and transforming into nuclear units.

- Individualistic attitudes and rising aspirations with the accompanying changes in lifestyles are widening the generation gap
- India's ageing population is expected to grow at more than double the rate of the general population. The UN Population Division estimates that by 2050, India will have 21.16 per cent of the population above the age of 60 as compared to 60.34 per cent aged between 15 and 59 years.

Issues:

Issues with old age in India-

According to the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), 45 per cent of elderly males and 75 per cent of elderly females are currently fully dependent on others.

The main issues that characterise old age security are:

- Traditional systems of inter-generational care are either breaking down or are no longer perceived as reliable.
- Assets, especially land and property, are seen as the best way to guarantee old-age security but seem to be out of reach for many poor people.
- Poor people usually have a low estimate of and little experience with their capacity to use savings as a route to old-age security.

Immature pension industry-

India has a very young and immature pension industry and a population that is not particularly keen to secure its retirement. A mere 7.4 per cent of the total Indian population is covered under any form of pension plans, which is an alarming figure in itself. India spends 1.45 per cent of its GDP on social protection, among the lowest in Asia, far lower than China, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and even Nepal.

Challenges:

- The biggest challenge is the fact that almost 85 per cent of Indian labour is still deployed in the informal sector, mostly as daily wage workers. It is extremely difficult to cover informal sector employees under a national pension scheme.
- The reluctance of people towards investing any part of their income over a large period of time, an absence of regular income for clients, poor infrastructure and connectivity, and remote spread of clientele.

Measures taken:

Government schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana and the New Pension Scheme (NPS) of 2003 are steps in the right direction. The NPS is slowly gaining popularity and expects huge enrolment from the informal labour segment.

Options:

For the poor and vulnerable, two types of pension could be provided.

- Public or social pension, where the state raises revenue and redistributes to citizens when they reach a stipulated age in order to guarantee them a dignified life.
- Micro-pension, a personal retirement savings plan. Though informal sector workers may not “retire” in the formal sense like employees in the organised sector, they need to prepare for the eventual reduction in earning capacity that will occur during old age, especially on account of ill health. Micro-pension, therefore, aims to provide an income stream to coincide with this decline in earning capacity.

A pension is a financial tool that is generally defined as a system of monthly payments by an individual during his working life to enable her/him to maintain a decent standard of living post-retirement.

Way forward:

There is an immediate need for a reliable and convenient pension programme to address the old age problems of the poor.

- To determine how long-term saving products might help solve the problem of old-age income security, an improved understanding of the behavioural, economic and institutional barriers to participation are required.
- For micro-pensions to succeed, a delicate balance between economic viability, generation of adequate returns, and customised features for the participants is required.
- As the flow of income of low-income communities is uncertain or volatile owing to the nature of their economy, they should be offered a degree of financial flexibility.
- In order to facilitate the making of frequent deposits, convenient door-to-door deposit collection has to be organised.

Conclusion:

An ideal micro-pension programme needs to address governance, design, administrative and efficiency issues to succeed and requires a multi-model implementation of micro-pension plans in addition to a separate set of regulations. The pension system of the economy has to evolve quickly, or else the economy will be left in a dire state.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the issues the old age in India when it comes to financial security post-retirement. Micro-pension programmes help sort out the issues. Discuss.

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*

25 years of India-ASEAN relationship**Background:**

India and the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are currently celebrating 25 years of their rapidly expanding partnership. They are also marking 15 years of their Summit engagement and five years of Strategic their Partnership. In addition, ASEAN completed 50 years of its establishment in 2017. To mark the 25th anniversary of the partnership, all 10 Heads of States/Governments of ASEAN States will participate as Chief Guests in the Republic Day celebrations on 26 January 2018. The presence of the entire ASEAN leadership on this occasion is a natural extrapolation of the Act East Policy (AEP).

India and ASEAN:

India and ASEAN account for about 30 per cent of the global population (i.e., 1.85 billion people) and a combined GDP of approximately USD 5.1 trillion. Together, they would form the third largest economy in the world. Given their combined clout, it is but natural for them to expand their areas of collaboration particularly in view of the rapidly changing and uncertain global and regional scenario. Originally conceived as an economic initiative in 1991, this engagement has evolved in terms of geographical expanse and sectoral reach across the three pillars of politico-security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation. Besides geographical proximity, historical commonalities, cultural affinities and commercial interests, India's AEP has been driven by geo-strategic concerns as well. Relations with ASEAN have become multi-faceted to encompass security, connectivity, strategic, political, space technology, counter-terrorism and anti-insurgency operations, anti-radicalisation, trade and investment, maritime security and defence collaboration, in addition to economic ties.

Economic partnership:

India's two-way trade with ASEAN now stands at approximately USD 76 billion. The India-ASEAN Free Trade pact in services and investments, which was concluded in 2014, has the potential to reduce India's trade deficit with the region as also impart a strong impulse to bilateral exchanges.

India is also a part of the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which, when concluded and implemented, will cover almost 40 per cent of the world's population, 33 per cent of global GDP and 40 per cent of world trade.

Strategic partnership:

The ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), established in 2013, has enhanced the strategic partnership by concentrating on policy research and recommendations as well as organising meetings between think-tanks and similar institutions in India and ASEAN countries. AIC seeks to bridge the existing information divide amongst the people of the two regions. Exchange programmes have been put in place for frequent interaction between students, senior officials, diplomats, academics, media professionals, etc.

Connectivity between India and ASEAN:

Better infrastructure connecting Northeast India and ASEAN has become the sine qua non for stronger economic and trade partnership and vital contributor to prosperity and economic development of the region. Two major connectivity projects, viz., **the Trilateral Highway** between north-east India and Myanmar and onwards to Thailand (and Laos and Vietnam) as well as **the Kaladan multi-modal transit and transport project**, have been under implementation for several years.

Act East Policy:

AEP is the successor to the Look East Policy (LEP) that was put in place by then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992 under radically different geo-political and economic circumstances. LEP was primarily focused on strengthening economic ties between India and ASEAN states. The end of the cold war and disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 provided a welcome opportunity for India to reach out to South-East Asia to capitalize upon its historical, cultural and civilisational linkages with the region. ASEAN continues to form the central pillar of India's Act East Policy.

India, ASEAN, and the Chinese Conundrum:

In a rapidly evolving geo-political scenario marked by China's assertive military, political and economic rise, the AEP has imparted greater dynamism to India's ties with ASEAN.

The issue of ownership, control, use and exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and fisheries resources in the South China Sea has emerged as a major dispute between China and several ASEAN countries like Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia. There is no unanimity amongst the ASEAN countries on how to deal with China on this issue. Importance of SCS for India:

- 40 per cent of India's trade passes through the South China Sea.

- India is also interested in harnessing fossil fuel resources in the region for meeting its energy needs.
- ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) entered into an agreement with Vietnam to prospect in oil blocks 127 and 128 off the Paracel islands which fall within the Exclusive Economic Zone of Vietnam.

India and several other countries have supported freedom of navigation, ensuring maritime security, expeditious resolution of disputes according to provisions of international law, viz., the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas 1982, developing a Code of Conduct, and settlement of disputes through dialogue and peaceful means. China's actions have added to the anxieties and concerns of countries in South East Asia and beyond. They want India to play a more active countervailing role in the region. This interest and desire on the part of these countries goes with the efforts by India to pro-actively reach out to countries of the region for mutually beneficial engagements.

India – U.S. Partnership in the Region:

Relations between India and USA have progressed and grown in recent years. Trump's consistent use of the expression "Indo-Pacific" throughout his visit, instead of the more commonly used "Asia Pacific" to signify that India is a significant player in the region, sent out a clear message about the common position held by India and USA regarding developments in the region. It also signalled that the USA and India will partner each other to promote a free and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. A meeting of the Quad (USA, Japan, Australia and India) at the level of officials also gave a strong indication of the interest of these countries in working together to ensure a free, open, inclusive and prosperous region.

Challenges and Opportunities:

- Stronger relations between India and Myanmar have helped to quell insurgency and extremism in the north-eastern states of India. Peace, stability and security of north-east India will be further preserved and promoted with more robust ties and understanding with Myanmar. India has recognized that the success of the AEP will be determined by its contribution to security and economic development of Northeast India.
- The large Indian diasporas in many Southeast Asian countries help strengthen diplomatic, economic and security relations between India and ASEAN as they contribute to expand and intensify bonds. The Indian diaspora comprises an important instrument of India's soft power.
- The promotion of India's geostrategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region depend on India's bilateral and multilateral/regional engagements with the countries in the region. It is hence essential to strengthen collaboration with ASEAN as an organization as well as with individual Southeast Asian countries.

Conclusion:

Despite progress made over the last 25 years in India-ASEAN ties, there remains immense scope for further growth in the relationship. This is one of the most dynamic regions of the world today, and it is necessary for both India and ASEAN to actively collaborate to shape the so-called 'Asian century'. A stronger partnership and enhanced cooperation should be prioritised by both sides if the full potential of this engagement is to be realised.

Connecting the dots:

- India and the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are currently celebrating 25 years of their partnership. Discuss how the relation has evolved over time and also the challenges and opportunities for India when it comes to ASEAN.

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*

Pragmatic engagement with Russia**Background:**

Since the end of the Cold War, the West and especially America viewed Russia with unbelievable superiority. Through his eight-year tenure, US president Barack Obama dismissed Russia as a "regional power". Nearly three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, America and Europe are now calling Russia a political and military threat. This transformation of the Western perceptions of Russia is because of actions taken by President Vladimir Putin. He has surprised the West by putting Russia right back at the centre of great power politics.

Russia at centre of great power politics:

- Putin's military modernisation, a robust nuclear doctrine and a penchant for coercive diplomacy have become a cause of concern for Russia's European neighbours.
- **Beyond Europe**, Russia has joined China in reshaping the geopolitics of Eurasia. It has re-emerged as a critical player in the Middle East. In partnership with Beijing, Moscow also created regional institutions like the SCO, challenging Western primacy in international institutions. Moscow has demonstrated the capability to disrupt Western plans with an asymmetric strategy.

Pragmatic engagement:

Russia's tightening embrace of China and its way of handling the Taliban and the Pakistan army are generating unease. Instead of lamenting, Delhi must reimagine India's relations with Russia in 2018 and beyond on the basis of clear-eyed realism. Three elements must constitute this pragmatic engagement:

- Having long-wished and campaigned for a multipolar world, Delhi must learn to live with it. A world of many powers is far more unstable than the Cold War duopoly and the unipolar moment. Realignment, dealignment and multi-alignment are the features of the contemporary world. India, on its part, has sought to hold onto Russia while rapidly expanding its ties with the US. Russia, which drew closer to India in the 1960s to counter China, now hangs on trilateralism with Delhi and Beijing. But the reality is India is trying to balance China by turning to America and Japan. Russia is trying to balance the West by aligning with China. India can't expect a veto over Russia's China policy, nor it can cede one to Moscow on India's ties with the US. India's bilateral ties with Russia must necessarily be defined by these **boundary conditions** in the near term.
- India needs to appreciate Russia's long-term strategy towards the West. What Putin wants is an honourable accommodation with the West that Russians feel was denied after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In a world of changing distribution of power, Russia is aware that it can't reinvent a duopoly with America. Putin wants to make Russia a "swing state" in the global balance of power marked by the rise of China and the uncertain evolution of America.
- If Russia is conscious of its limitations, Delhi's strategic community seems hesitant to acknowledge India's strengths. India's GDP today, at \$2.4 trillion, is nearly twice that of Russia. Many in Delhi's foreign policy establishment, who grew up thinking of Russia as a warm blanket in a cold and uncertain world, are unprepared for a relationship that is more in tune with the changed circumstances in which India is emerging as a power in its own right.

Russia's relative weight may have diminished, but it has a long tradition of great power diplomacy. It has military capabilities and the political will to use force that together can shape global and regional balances. As middle powers, there is much that Delhi and Moscow can do with each other.

Conclusion:

In the new circumstances, Delhi and Moscow must move towards a practical relationship that focuses on give and take wherever possible. The two sides must also carefully manage the inevitable differences that arise.

Connecting the dots:

- India has always strived for multi-polar world. In this light Russia's actions should not be seen as a threat. It is time that India engaged pragmatically with Russia. Discuss.

TOPIC***General Studies 2:***

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

India-ASEAN: 25 years of relationship**Background:**

ASEAN has subtly resisted to the concept of “Indo-Pacific”, and preferred “Asia-Pacific”, which, by definition, seems to exclude India. Such views need to be addressed by our foreign policy establishment, because we are at a defining moment in the Indo-ASEAN relationship. Not only was 2017 the golden jubilee year of ASEAN’s founding, it also happens to mark 25 years of Indo ASEAN engagement, and 15 years of summit-level meetings. 10 ASEAN leaders will be the guests of honour at India’s 2018 Republic Day celebrations, and their exchanges could decide the future course of this relationship.

Issues:

- ASEAN has been blamed for a false sense of complacency and for sidestepping hard security issues. The 2012 ASEAN Summit saw emerging tensions between the Philippines, Cambodia and Laos, under Chinese pressure, on South China Sea issues.
- There is also criticism that having painstakingly built a set of multilateral processes in the security arena, ASEAN has failed to develop proactive agendas that would take the grouping beyond trade and commerce, towards collegiate diplomacy and collective conflict management.

An “emerging China” had transmuted into an “erupting China”, an alarming phenomenon that, calls for multi-lateral efforts to “bring under control”.

- Chinese diplomats have left little doubt, that China would avail the earliest opportunity to create a new “rules-based order”, framing international laws and rules that not only provide retrospective endorsement of its conduct, but also facilitate its vision of the new “China Dream”.

- For over six decades, peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific had been underwritten by America, sustained by US naval presence. Neither the US “pivot to Asia” nor the subsequent “rebalance” has served to restore regional equilibrium disturbed by China’s assertive behaviour. China’s creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea and their militarisation are now a fait accompli unlikely to be reversed. This blatant disregard of UN Laws of the Seas as well as the international justice system has triggered regional fears about the impending imposition of a Chinese hegemony on the region.
- Having stood up to China, on Doklam as well as OBOR, India’s supporters in ASEAN visualise it as a rising economic and military entity worth having on their side. Others argue that India has, so far, brought little to the ASEAN table, and point to its diplomatic equilibrium, that stands in stark contrast to Chinese activism on the Rohingya and North Korean issues.

Way forward:

- The geo-physical Malacca Strait barrier is important but we need to equally focus on Indo-ASEAN integration. PM Modi’s “Act-East” vision must not lose steam due to sub-continental and domestic distractions, as well as an understaffed and overstretched diplomatic officials.
- India’s domain of maritime interest — now stretching right across the Indo-Pacific — offers a wide range of opportunities quite apart from the nascent “quadrilateral”. In 2015, PM Modi had defined his vision of “Sagar” as “a future for the Indian Ocean that ensures security and growth for all in the region”. This vision needs to be unshackled from its Indian Ocean moorings and adapted for an all-round maritime outreach. Sustaining “good order at sea” is a vital enterprise that demands collaborative multi-lateral action. Safety of shipping, anti-piracy operations, search-and-rescue and disaster relief are responsibilities — so far outsourced to the Americans and Europeans — which Indo-Pacific navies must jointly shoulder.

Conclusion:

Without relying on the crutch of US endorsements about its status as a “global power”, India must envision broader horizons for itself. The initiation of an “Indo-Pacific Maritime Partnership” that seeks mutually-beneficial maritime security cooperation with ASEAN nations will put it in a leadership role. But slogans need to be backed up by strategies — thus India should craft a National Maritime Strategy.

Connecting the dots:

- India and ASEAN are celebrating 25 years of their engagement. Discuss how far the partnership has been strengthened and what more needs to be done.

- India's focus over 'Quad' grouping or usage of Indo-Pacific term has created apprehensions in ASEAN. On the other hand the ASEAN nations too want India to play a defining role. In this light discuss the importance of being pragmatic and adopting a balance approach.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

India-Israel Relations: Past and Present

Introduction:

The below articles deal with India-Israel ties, how it evolved since the countries became nations in 1947.

The two countries established diplomatic ties in January 1992. The two countries are celebrating 25 years of friendship, and collaborating in a spectrum of areas.

Timeline:

1947: The UN drafted a plan of partition of Mandate Palestine. This was approved by the UN General Assembly, but **rejected by** most of the Arab world and also by **India**.

1950: India recognised Israel, but did not establish diplomatic relations.

1956: The then Israeli foreign minister visited India in the middle of **the Suez crisis** when Israeli armed forces pushed into Egypt after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the canal. **India was one of the mediators** along with the US, the UK and Yugoslavia.

1962: PM Jawaharlal Nehru writes to Israeli PM Ben Gurion seeking **arms and ammunition supply during the war with China**. Israel responds, making it the basis for defence ties between the two countries.

1971: PM Indira Gandhi asks then Israeli PM Golda Meir for **weapons for the war against Pakistan**. Meir agrees.

1977: Foreign minister Moshe Dayan visits India, meets PM Morarji Desai.

1985: PM Rajiv Gandhi meets with his Israeli counterpart on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting. It's the first public meeting between leaders of the two countries.

1992: **Diplomatic ties between India and Israel formally established** by the **Narasimha Rao government**. Israel opens its embassy in New Delhi in February and in May, India opens its embassy in Tel Aviv.

1996: India acquires 32 IAI Searcher unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, from Israel.

1996: Israeli President Ezer Weizman leads a 24-member business delegation to India. Weizman is the **first Israeli head of state to visit India**. Weapons deal involving the purchase of the **Barak-1 vertically-launched surface-to-air missiles** is finalised.

1999: **Israel supplies weapons** as India battled Pakistani insurgents and army regulars during the **Kargil war**.

2000: Home minister L.K. Advani meets Israeli President Weizman in Tel Aviv to discuss techniques employed to **curb terrorism**. India and Israel set up a **joint anti-terror commission**.

2003: **Ariel Sharon becomes the first Israeli PM to visit India**. (Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime)

2006: Israel and India sign an **agriculture cooperation pact**

2009: Israeli **Barak 8 air defence system** is sold to India for \$1.1 billion.

2013: Israel announces help to India to diversify and raise yields of its **fruit and vegetable crops** through **centres of excellence** across India.

2014: PM Narendra Modi meets Israeli PM Netanyahu on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York, the first such meeting in over a decade.

2015: **India abstains from vote against Israel at the UN Human Rights Commission**, signalling a shift in its Israel-Palestine policy.

2015: **President Pranab Mukherjee visits Israel** to initiate deals on various collaborative projects on technology and culture.

2016: External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj visits Tel Aviv. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin visits India for six days.

2017: Three warships from the Indian navy dock in the **Israeli port of Haifa**.

2017: Pilots from India join pilots from Israel, the US, Germany, France, Italy and Poland for the **2017 Blue Flag exercise**, the largest aerial training exercise to ever take place in Israel.

2017: **PM Narendra Modi makes a stand-alone visit to Israel, the first ever by an Indian PM**, and spends three days in the country.

2017: India voted against the US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel at the UN General Assembly.

Now (2017): Benjamin Netanyahu, second Israeli PM to visit India.

India-Israel recent highlights of Benjamin Netanyahu's visit:

- Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu visit will further cement close friendship between the two nations.
- His visit to Mumbai, where the majority of India's Jews community live, is expected to boost Jews' profile.
- Emphasis on forging technology and innovation partnerships to elevate ties.
- Focus areas for cooperation: defence, agriculture, water conservation, high technology and innovation.

- Israel wants to upgrade economic linkages with India.
- Bilateral trade is currently at \$4 billion excluding defence purchases by India
- **India-Israel Innovation Bridge** will act as link between start-ups of India and Israel.
- India and Israel will begin work on a **free trade pact** that Israel has been pushing for.
- Israel has given initial approval for Indian energy companies to explore oil and gas in the eastern Mediterranean, in the first such move by Indian firms in that region.
- 'Trilateral Fund' of \$50 million has been created by Israel-India Technology Group (I-ITG) to promote entrepreneurship and trilateral business opportunities between the US, India and Israel.
- In terms of global innovation index ranking, Israel is 17th while India is at 60th spot.

Both countries inked nine pacts to boost cooperation in key areas, such as cyber security, agriculture, technology security, oil and gas sector, film-co- production, amendments to an air transport pact, AYUSH (ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy, unani, siddha and homeopathy), space, solar-thermal energy panels, strategic areas of defence and counter- terrorism etc.

Concern area: India's shrinking Jew Community

Although historians believe Jews first arrived in India 2,000 years ago, their descendents today say they are virtually unknown in a country where they are hugely outnumbered by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians.

Nor are Jews officially recognised as a minority community by India's government. India is in fact home to several distinct Jewish groups.

India's Jewish population peaked at around 20,000 in the mid 1940s. Numbers have dwindled rapidly because of emigration since the creation of Israel in 1948.

Connecting the dots:

(The above article only deals with understanding the ties and background of India-Israel relations. In upcoming articles, we will be dealing with assessment part.)

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *India and its neighborhood relations, 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.*
- *Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.*

India admitted as the 43rd member of the Australia Group

Introduction:

India was recently admitted as the 43rd member of the **Australia Group**, an informal bloc of countries that keeps a tight control over exports of substances used in the making of chemical weapons.

With its admission into the Australia Group, India is now part of three of the four key export control groups in the world.

Australia Group is the third multilateral export control group – after the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and Wassenaar Arrangement – that India has become a member of.

India joined the MTCR in June 2016, followed by the Wassenaar Arrangement in December 2017.

The only export control group that India is not a part of is the elite Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which controls the export of sensitive nuclear technologies and equipment, with the aim of preventing nuclear weapons' proliferation.

Basics: The four key export control groups:

MTCR, NSG, Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement – are the four nuclear regimes – aim to restrict the proliferation of items that could lead to the spread of, among others, weapons of mass destruction and chemical and biological weapons.

Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR):

- It is a multilateral, consensus – based grouping of 35 member countries (**includes India, China is not a member of this regime**) who are voluntarily committed to the non-proliferation of missiles capable of carrying chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).
- It controls the export of the technologies and materials involved in ballistic missile systems and unmanned aerial vehicles particularly capable of carrying nuclear warheads of above 500kg payload for more than 300 km.
- This is a non-treaty association of member countries with certain guidelines about the information sharing, national control laws and export policies for missile systems and a rule-based regulation mechanism to limit the transfer of such critical technologies of these missile systems.
- India had joined MTCR as a full member and also agreed to join the Hague Code of conduct made it bolster its position as a responsible nuclear state and strengthen its case for the membership of other multilateral export control regimes like Nuclear Suppliers Group, Australia Group, and Wassenaar arrangement.

Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG):

- Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a group of nuclear supplier countries that seek to prevent nuclear proliferation by controlling the export of materials, equipment, and technology that can be used to manufacture nuclear weapons.
- 48-nation group that frames and implements agreed rules for exporting nuclear equipment, with a view to controlling the spread of nuclear weapons. It is not a formal organization, and its guidelines are not binding. Decisions, including on membership, are made by consensus.
- India is not a member of NSG.

Australia Group (AG):

- It is an informal bloc of countries that keeps a tight control over exports of substances used in the making of chemical weapons.
- It was established in 1985.
- It has now has 43 members. China, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea are not its members.

Wassenaar Arrangement (WG):

- The Wassenaar Arrangement (not to be confused with the Wassenaar Agreement), (full name: The Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods and Technologies) is a multilateral export control regime (MECR) with 41 participating states.
- The Wassenaar Arrangement was established to contribute to regional and international security and stability by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies, thus preventing destabilizing accumulations.
- Participating States seek, through their national policies, to ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities which undermine these goals, and are not diverted to support such capabilities.

Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):

- 1968 treaty to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament. It identifies “nuclear weapons states” as those that tested devices before January 1, 1967, which means India could never be one and thus it refused to sign it.

Conclusion:

With its admission into the AG, India has demonstrated the will to implement rigorous controls of high standards in international trade, and its capacity to adapt its national regulatory system to meet the necessities of its expanding economy

The inclusion will help to raise India's stature in the field of non-proliferation, though it is not signatory to Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and help in acquiring critical technologies.

It is also expected to strengthen India's bid to enter 48-member Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

Connecting the dots:

- India wants to be part of the rule-making groups rather than being out of them and on the sidelines. Examine the statement keeping in view the steps and efforts taken by India to gain entry into the missile treaty club.
- India's admittance into three of the four key export control groups is a big step forward in its quest for formal acceptance as a responsible nuclear power. Comment.

TOPIC***General Studies 2:***

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

India-ASEAN: Economic engagement**Background:**

This Republic Day, heads of the all the ten Asean economies — Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Brunei — will meet in Delhi. Asean is touted to become the fourth largest economic bloc in the world by 2030. As the region increasingly witnesses Chinese interference in and around the Indian Ocean, it has become important for India to strengthen its relationship with other Asian economies.

The 3Cs: Commerce, Connectivity and Culture

It should ideally become the pivot of cooperation between Asean and India.

It is true that India's mythology and culture find great resonance across the entire Asean region. But in order to add value to our relationships we need to have proactive and constructive commercial engagement with Asean economies.

Asean's potential:

Asean today is one of the most thriving business and commerce centres globally. The region constitutes around 8 per cent of the global exports, and receives 15 per cent of world investments, while having almost 26 per cent in outward investments. It is also home to economies such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, which are often touted as the last frontier economies in the world having exhibited more than 7 per cent growth consistently over the past few years.

Benefits for India:

- Indian businesses could benefit by setting up production units in Asean, which could then act as a platform for them to enter China with whom Asean has an FTA.
- India could also benefit from Asean's trade agreements with other economies in the region.
- The ambition to have an Asean Economic Community would catapult the ten economies of \$2.6 trillion into a single market and production base. This would provide Indian business unparalleled access to over 622 million people, almost double the population of the US.

Poor economic cooperation:

India's commitment to trade and investment in Asean remains far from impressive. While around 10 per cent of India's exports goes to Asean, we contribute only 2 per cent to Asean's total import from across the globe. In fact, the balance of trade has always been in favour of Asean.

Chinese challenge:

There exists the continuous dominance and interference by China in some of the economies in the region as it gets desperate to win control in and around the subcontinent. The entire Asean region is flooded with Chinese products. For example, in Cambodia, many government vehicles sport the tag, "Gifted by friends from China". Coincidentally, India was instrumental in Cambodia securing freedom, but today finds it difficult to have a significant commercial presence in that country. Meanwhile, China has gained significant prowess and is able to exploit differences within Asean. Investments, soft loans, grants and assistance have been offered to most of the new frontier economies, making it difficult for countries such as India to do genuine business there.

Way ahead:

- India needs to be cautious while negotiating the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with China being the big elephant in the room.
- Trade facilitation is one of the key areas. It is important for Indian banks to set up operations in the region which would help Indian businesses.
- Aspects such as Mutual Recognition Agreement in the context of services should be ratified at the earliest keeping aside any apprehension.
- India may also explore opportunity to be a part of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation or APEC, and to the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation (CMIM) — a mechanism created in 2010 to help manage regional financial crisis.
- Both India and Asean would require to tweak their existing policies to facilitate trade and investment and, more importantly, maintain a sustainable environment for peace in the region.

- Asean's strength today lies in plantations, electronics and heavy machinery, while for India it is largely in computer services, light engineering and pharmaceuticals. Both sides need to create appropriate frameworks to reduce both tariff and non-tariff barriers to widen the scope of trade, while looking at participation in the value chain.
- India in 2015 announced a Rs. 500-crore Project Development Fund, which was meant to encourage Indian businesses to set up ventures in CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam). The region offers a lot of opportunities for Indian entities in project exports, supply contracts, and creating utility infrastructure, apart from having manufacturing set-ups. It is important for India that such initiatives are realised soon, especially when it faces competition from an aggressive Chinese.
- India must strive to penetrate in Asean economies. The engagement should avoid any inordinate delay.

Conclusion:

Given that the US is moving towards protectionism with the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, its influence over Asean is decreasing. Thus, despite a looming Chinese presence, the ten-country bloc can offer lucrative business and strategic opportunities. A benign and non-hegemonic engagement between India and Asean would yield sound economic results.

Connecting the dots:

- India- ASEAN relationship has huge potential. Discuss. Also highlight the challenges and way forward.

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*

Making India-ASEAN relationship functional

In news:

The year 2017 was an important landmark as India and the ASEAN commemorated 25 years of their partnership, 15 years of summit-level interaction, and five years of strategic partnership.

The challenge now is to map out next steps in the India-ASEAN partnership at this time of unprecedented geopolitical flux in the wider Indo-Pacific.

Sense of disillusionment:

There has been a sense of disillusionment on both sides about the present state of play in the relationship.

While the ASEAN member states have been disappointed that India performs less than its potential in the region, New Delhi's expectations regarding a more robust support for its regional outreach too have not been met. India's capacity to provide development assistance, market access and security guarantees remains limited and ASEAN's inclination to harness New Delhi for regional stability remains circumscribed by its sensitivities to other powers. The interests and expectations of the two sides remain far from aligned, preventing them from having candid conversations and realistic assessments.

Other issues:

- Though the government's 'Act East' policy is aimed at enhancing India's strategic profile in East and Southeast Asia, New Delhi's main focus remains on South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.
- India's economic focus is not in tune with other regional powers which view ASEAN as an important market for exports and investments. India's export sector remains weak and the government's focus has shifted to boosting manufacturing domestically.
- India's interest in ASEAN as a multilateral forum remains lacklustre. Myanmar and Thailand have emerged as key players in India's southeastern outreach. The hope is to use these nations as a bridge to ASEAN. Prioritising these countries over others in ASEAN may also prevent others from looking at India as a regional stakeholder.

Making the cooperation functional:

It is important for India and ASEAN to chart out a more operational, though modest, agenda for future cooperation. The three Cs of commerce, connectivity and culture have been highlighted but a more granular perspective is needed in terms of a forging a forward-looking approach.

- Enhancing trade and economic linkages between India and ASEAN is quintessential.
- They also need to focus on areas such as digital technologies. India, as a fast-emerging major player, has significant comparative advantages. As Chinese giants begin to dominate the digital space in Southeast Asia and concerns rise about their ability to own data, the Indian IT sector may take some advantage. India as a facilitator of the ASEAN-wide digital economy would not only challenge China but also emerge as an economic guarantor of its own.

- New Delhi needs to focus on effective delivery of projects it is already committed to. In this context, prompt completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, which will run from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar, is key. The plan is to extend this highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in an attempt to project India's role in the emerging transportation architecture.
- With China having three times more commercial flights than India to Southeast Asia, improving air connectivity between India and ASEAN countries should also be high on the agenda.
- The Bay of Bengal can be used as an exploratory ground for the development of an India-ASEAN maritime framework.
- The cultural connect between the two needs strengthening. While India offers scholarships to students from ASEAN states to study at Nalanda University, this initiative should be extended to the IITs and the IIMs. Tourism too can be further encouraged between India and the ASEAN with some creative branding by the two sides.

Conclusion:

While India and the ASEAN have been very ambitious in articulating the potential of their partnership, they have been much less effective in operationalising their ideas. The need now is to **focus on functional cooperation**.

Connecting the dots:

- India and ASEAN relationship has great potential. There have been many ideas but only few have operationalized effectively. Analyze.

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.*

Restructuring India's China policy

Background:

As we complete two decades of the 21st century, a paradigm change in the global power structure is taking shape. Technology and size are causing this change.

Potential power is shifting to the two large nations of the Asian mainland, China and India, which are fast-growing economies.

Continental shift:

- Asia already accounts for almost half of the world's population, half of the world's container traffic, one-third of its bulk cargo and 40% of the world's off-shore oil reserves.
- It is home to several fast-growing new economies with GDP growth rates above 7% per year, i.e. a doubling of the GDP every 10 years. Asian defence spending (\$439 billion) is also much more than Europe's (\$386 billion).

India and China:

- Since the late 1990s, China and India have been rapidly emerging as influential power hubs.
- Being two of the three most populous and largest GDP nations, India and China, both culturally akin, are socially structured on family values and associated social attitudes.
- Potentially both are poised to fill the role of global powers.

The global power matrix has undergone a paradigm change, from an exclusively Atlantic shores-based concerns to emerging Indo-Pacific ocean strategic issues. Thus India-China relations matter as never before. The diminishing influence of Western powers in the region, and as of now the acknowledged rising power of China are the new global reality.

Issues:

- China has conceptualised and implemented the centrality of befriending all of India's neighbours and has brought them on board in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). India has been reduced to merely reacting to such proposals without any of her own to canvass as an alternative.
- There is an unfortunate trust deficit that requires frank bilateral discussion at a high political level.

Restructuring policy:

The key for India today is to bond strategically with China. But this requires dealing bilaterally on huge pending issues. To achieve the potential, both require hardware, software and the clear mindset for exercising this power. India is now poised to form a global triangle with the U.S. and China, and therefore the government must seize the opportunity, which requires a serious effort at reconciliation with China in a give-and-take mode without sacrificing our national interest.

From regional to global player:

- A change in strategic conceptualisation is needed, from the present land-focussed thinking to Ocean-centric articulation. The Indian Ocean has now emerged as the epicentre of global power play in the 21st century. We need to recognise the centrality and primacy of the Indian Ocean in India's global economic and military activism: the Indian Ocean is the epicentre of global power play in the 21st century. With Indonesian partnership, India can monitor the Malacca Strait through which over 80% of the freight traffic of China and East Asia passes.
- As an important part of its diplomacy, India must develop deeper cultural and civilisational linkages with China and the rest of Asia.
- **Looking beyond Pakistan:** In terms of hardware capability and mindset, India is at present only a regional power. Because it is obsessed with the problem of Pakistan-trained terrorists entering Indian territory rather than asserting higher priority on global issues. This makes it easy for other countries to hyphenate the two regional-minded nations, India with Pakistan. India needs a new mindset: to look beyond Pakistan. India has the capacity and the opportunity to rise as a 'responsible and influential global power'. This will easily fix Pakistan and its terrorist propensity.
- India need to learn to exercise power without being seen as a bully by our neighbors.
- Exerting soft power advantage- The world already is dazzled by India's prowess in information technology, the capability to produce pharmaceuticals at low cost, and the high quality of its trained manpower capable of innovation. But India does not exert this soft power advantage on the world scene commensurate with this potential or its size in Asia.

Connecting the dots:

- India's China policy needs a re-structuring based on a fresh perspective that is relevant for the 21st century. Discuss.

HEALTH

TOPIC

General studies 2:

- *Issues relating to development and management of social sector/services relating to Health , Education, Human Resources*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

General studies 4:

- *Ethics and human interface*
- *Probity in governance*

Clinical trials: Lured by blood money

Introduction:

The below article deals with concerns/issues in clinical trials in India and provides suggestions for the same.

Basics:

- The goal of clinical research is to develop generalizable knowledge that improves human health or increases understanding of human biology. People who participate in clinical research make it possible to secure that knowledge.
- The path to finding out if a new drug or treatment is safe or effective, for example, is to test it on patient volunteers.
- But by placing some people at risk of harm for the good of others, clinical research has the potential to exploit patient volunteers.

As the demand grows for newer and better drugs for an expanding range of conditions, so too does the need for clinical testing.

‘Health as a commodity, repositions ethics within an economic framework’, and human experimentation is no exception. Profits, rather than people, become the prime consideration.

Concerns:

1. Over-volunteering for clinical trials

- In India, there is a trend of growing number of people who are over-volunteering for clinical trials in order to supplement their income.

2. Deceiving for personal gain

- There is even greater problem when volunteers who are desperate for money deceive investigators, lying about their age, health or other medications, just so they can participate.
- It isn't uncommon for volunteers to break trial rules and lie. Even though clinical research organisations (CROs) screen for infections such as HIV and hepatitis, and illnesses like anaemia and diabetes, they cannot catch everything.
- This disturbing trend is putting at risk the health of serial volunteers as well as the reliability of trial data.

There are instances where volunteers (especially from Hyderabad, Karimnagar, and Mumbai) participating in over 30 studies in a decade, and to have broken rules to make a quick buck. This included hopping from one trial to another without a three-month gap in between, drinking alcohol, and hiding one's health history. Such behaviour can distort trial data.

- Unsafe drugs can make their way into the market as a result, or safe drugs can get rejected. This is why volunteer honesty is paramount.

3. Large demand for volunteers

- As said earlier, as the demand grows for newer and better drugs for an expanding range of conditions, so too does the need for clinical testing.
- Drug companies are drawn to India for several reasons, including a technically competent workforce, patient availability, low costs and a friendly drug-control system.
- Regulations have become more stringent in the developed world. Hence, all drug-makers are moving clinical trials to global south, as greater availability of "naive" participants, fewer regulatory safeguards, high levels of poverty and illiteracy, combined with an almost blind faith in Western medicine, provide an almost endless supply of "willing" volunteers in countries such as Africa, China, India and parts of Eurasia. "It's a big business".
- The large demand for volunteers and the supply of willing subjects has spawned a bustling marketplace for participation in clinical trials. Dozens of groups on the instant messaging platform WhatsApp, with telltale names like "Anytime Money", share information about ongoing studies. Around half-a-dozen advertisements for volunteers for trials turn up on the group each day.

4. Over-representation of low-income groups

- The big problem plaguing clinical research is an over-representation of low-income groups among trial subjects. Especially the vulnerable class of people, because of their poverty and low levels of education.

5. Unethical clinical trials

- The once booming clinical trials in India came under the Supreme Court scrutiny in 2013, after at least 370 deaths were attributed to Serious Adverse Events (SEAs) during such trials.

- Between 2005 and 2012 the deaths of 2,644 Indian subjects were linked to unethical clinical trials.
- Trials conducted in various parts of the country had violated patient rights as informed consent was not taken, and the patients subjected to clinical trials included newborns, children, pregnant women and mentally challenged persons are often exploited.
- There are instances of pharma-company agents exploiting gullible young people.

6. Poor regulation

- Under the Indian Drugs and Cosmetics Act, an independent body of doctors and laypersons, known as an ethics committee, must oversee a trial to make sure the rights of such groups are safeguarded. But bioethicists say this isn't happening.
- Drugs and Cosmetics Act requires every trial death to be investigated, even if it is not related to the drug. This is also not happening.

Solutions:

1. One potential solution is a **national registry of trial volunteers**, which will alert a CRO when someone signs up for two studies simultaneously. But this will need work, because volunteer privacy cannot be compromised. So regulators need to create a system that anonymises each participant's data.
2. Another option is to **pay volunteers less**, taking away the financial incentive to fudge their participation history. But this measure, in isolation, would reduce trial participation dramatically: an unacceptable side-effect because clinical trials are essential to drug research.
3. A third, more sustainable solution is to **encourage a wider cross-section of society to participate in research on human subjects**. Society at large must realise the valuable service that clinical research subjects perform by making drugs safe for the rest of us. It is imperative that this burden not fall completely on the vulnerable groups. Instead, the educated and affluent, who have greater access to the drugs that emerge from clinical research, must grasp the criticality of this research and pull their weight. Selectiveness in recruiting subjects for clinical trials leads not only to human rights violations but also to bad science. Civil society's vigilance is vital.
4. In any trial that relies heavily on vulnerable groups like daily wage earners, the ethics committee should mandatorily choose to **monitor subjects intensively, and counsel them on health risks**. For instance, by meeting participants and administering questionnaires to gauge their awareness.
5. Volunteers often keep their families in the dark, leaving them without a safety net when they fall ill or are exploited. The only way to tackle this trend in its entirety is through social campaigns to **improve awareness**.

6. For every clinical trial, the Drugs and Cosmetics Act requires participants to receive a copy of an **informed consent form**, which explains the trial protocol in great detail. This needs to be strictly followed.

Recent steps:

- From April, companies and organisations that have registered for clinical trials in India will have to disclose the outcomes of their tests within a year of completing them.
- Globally less than 60% of clinical trial outcomes are disclosed.
- Currently, all trials in India are registered on the **Clinical Trials Registry — India (CTRI)**. The Clinical Trials Registry encourages the registration of all clinical trials conducted in India before the enrolment of the first participant. The registry is meant to bring transparency to clinical trials conducted in India.
- The court asked the government to set in place a proper mechanism to regulate trials. This led to measures which required that compensation be paid to patients affected by trials and that there was audio-visual proof that participants had indeed consented to take part in a trial.

Conclusion:

Clinical trials involving human subjects have long been a flashpoint between bioethicists and clinical research organisations (CROs) in India. Landmark amendments to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act in 2013 led to better protection of vulnerable groups such as illiterate people, but more regulation is needed to ensure truly ethical research.

While CROs have argued that more rules will stifle the industry, the truth is that **ethical science is often better science**.

Efforts should be made for a safer, transparent and continuous monitoring mechanism.

The line should be drawn for this, that the trials on the name of academic should not be misused and diverted for commercial purposes.

Local activism and human rights agendas can effectively challenge, to some degree, the harmful outcomes of the market and to protect, against the exploitation of vulnerable people in clinical trials.

Connecting the dots:

- Before a drug is approved, it is required to be supported by clinical trials conducted by medical experts. Critically discuss the various issues involved.
- Critically examine the ethical issues during the conduct of clinical trials.
- The burden of volunteering for clinical trials must not fall only on the poor and vulnerable. Do you agree? Elucidate your opinion.

ECONOMY

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*

Electronics sector: Promoting competition

Introduction:

A growing middle class, rising disposable incomes, declining prices of electronics and a number of government initiatives have led to a fast-growing market for electronics and hardware products.

However, India's **weak manufacturing base** has not been able to respond to this increasing demand, leading to a growing trade deficit.

Background:

- Of the country's total demand for electronics, between 50-60% of the products and 70-80% of the components are imported.
- India's imports of electronic goods grew 31% between April and October 2017 to \$29.8 billion. Meanwhile, the trade deficit reached close to \$100 billion during the April-November period of 2017, against \$67 billion in the same eight-month period a year ago.
- India's share in the global electronics market was a minuscule 1.6% of the market in 2015 that is currently valued over \$1.75 trillion.

If the situation doesn't change, a report by Deloitte, expenses on electronics imports could surpass those on oil imports by 2020.

An opportunity for India:

- China, with its rising labour costs, will soon not be the global manufacturing hub it is today. This is an opportunity for countries like India, the Philippines, Thailand, etc., to attract companies to move their plants to their country. Despite its low costs of labour, India might lose this race if it doesn't reform the key sectors of the economy.
- Between 2000 and 2015, hardware production in India increased from Rs31,100 crore to Rs1.02 trillion. Meanwhile, information technology (IT) services revenue increased from Rs37,750 crore to Rs8.4 trillion. This shows that India is capable of producing globally competitive products.

- With a large domestic market and a number of trained engineers, India can clearly improve its electronics manufacturing supply chain.

Dealing with the problem:

- The government has listed the electronics industry as a priority sector under its Make In India campaign.
- There are various government schemes to encourage domestic manufacturing which provide tax and tariff concessions, investment subsidies, preferential market access in government procurement and export subsidy.
- The government recently increased the import duty on various electronic items like smartphones, LED bulbs and microwave ovens.

Issues and solution:

- The **inverted tax structure** for electronic goods. Due to a limited base of local component suppliers, manufacturers are dependent on importing parts. The positive custom duties on the components (or parts) used in electronic products make it expensive for domestic manufacturers to compete with foreign competitors who can access the components at lower prices.

Solution:

The solution is to bring the duties on components down to the level of the product. Some parts might be used for multiple products that may have different duties, but it's important to rule in favour of simple rules and apply the rate-cut regardless of use.

- Foreign direct investment (**FDI**) in **electronics is less than 1% of the total FDI inflow**. Reasons being- Onerous labour laws. Delays in land-acquisition. The uncertain tax regime.

Solution:

In order to inspire confidence, laws need to be liberal and predictable. In the case of taxation, it is important to clearly establish the tax liabilities under different circumstances in full detail.

A possible experiment could be special economic zones like the Dubai International Financial Centre—Dubai's normal civil and commercial laws do not apply in this area and a British chief justice ensures the practice of British common law.

- The **procedures for cross-border trade work** against the competitiveness of Indian producers as shown by the Doing Business rankings—India ranks 146 in the category of trading across borders due to the **high costs of compliance**. The numerous forms, fees, inspections and the associated time discourage domestic producers from exporting and keep them out of the international supply chain.

The way forward should be to increase the country's general competitiveness in the export market instead of pursuing sectoral policies. Instead of preserving our market for domestic manufacturers, the goal should be to capture a larger piece of the global market.

Conclusion:

Policy reforms favoring electronic sector, boosting it through competition, is the need of the hour as the industry has the potential to provide millions of jobs, directly and indirectly.

Connecting the dots:

- Policy reforms favoring electronic sector, boosting it through competition, is the need of the hour. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

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

Making Indian labour globally competitive

Background:

The integration of developing economies such as China and India into the global economy in the last few decades has helped lift millions out of poverty. The introduction of their labour forces into the global economy increased growth and income in these economies which also resulted in a decline in global inequality.

Second wave of change in the global labour market:

The World Bank's latest "Global Economic Prospects" report shows that the second wave of change in the global labour market will play out over the next two decades, with **developing economies contributing to all of the addition in the global skilled labour force**, as the number of skilled workers in advanced economies is expected to decline.

The rising level of skill and education in developing economies will also lift potential global growth and continue to reduce global inequality.

Introduction:

The global skilled workforce is likely to increase from 1.66 billion workers in 2011 to 2.16 billion by 2040. *Skilled workers have been defined as those having at least nine years of education.* Since improvement in the level of education and skill tends to increase income, rising income in the developing world will lead to a reduction in inequality. The global Gini coefficient is estimated to decline from 65.8 in 2012 to 62.6 by 2030.

Indian context:

The way things progress in India, to a large extent, will determine how fast income convergence happens and the level of global inequality declines. The World Bank in this context notes: “...fast-growing EMDEs (emerging market and developing economies) with a large number of poor, such as India, which accounts for 28 percent of the world’s poor in 2013, will continue to contribute to the reduction of global inequality.”

Benefiting from the gains:

The next wave of gains will depend on how well India adjusts to the changing economic and technological environment. India will need to make adjustments to be able to take advantage of a potential change in the composition of the global labour force. Policymakers will need to work on different levels to be able to **create a competitive labour force** and make India benefit from the emerging global situation.

- India urgently needs to focus on education and skill development. The “Annual State of Education Report” periodically shows the depressing state of education in Indian schools. Despite several initiatives by the government, outcomes in the area of skill development have also not been as desired.
- One way of improving outcomes could be better **use of technology in education**. India needs rapid improvement from primary to tertiary education to be able to compete in the global market. The changing technological landscape also means that the workforce should be in a position to make quick adjustments.
- The World Bank in its analysis assumes that additional workers will get employed. This will be a big challenge for India. It has not been able to create enough employment opportunities for people moving out of agriculture. The basic reason for this is India has not **capitalized on labour-intensive manufacturing**. India’s competitive advantage in some of the labour-intensive sectors has actually declined in recent years. The legal and regulatory requirements in markets like land and labour make it difficult for firms to grow and take advantage of economies of scale. To be able to absorb its rising workforce, India needs to remove impediments in the manufacturing sector.
- Even though inequality at the global level declined in recent decades, it has gone up in advanced economies as the national income share of wages came down. This has resulted in a political backlash. Therefore, there is a lingering risk of protectionism.

India will need to protect its interest in such an environment and look for opportunities to increase trade at both bilateral and multilateral forums. Also, adequate attention should be paid to currency management in the world of volatile capital flows. Exports are an important driver of growth and job creation. It will be difficult to grow at a faster pace without the backing of strong exports.

Conclusion:

A skilled labour force along with a focus on manufacturing and exports will help India grow at a faster rate in the medium to long run. An increasing number of skilled workers not only raises the potential growth but also reduces inequality within the country by reducing the skill premium.

Connecting the dots:

- An increasing number of skilled workers not only raises the potential growth but also reduces inequality within the country. Discuss. Given the importance of skilled labour, enumerate ways of making Indian labour competitive.

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

Labour reforms

Introduction:

Faster growth of jobs must be the principal objective of whatever economic reforms the Indian government undertakes now.

Arguments made in favor of labour reforms:

- The labour market is not functioning. The Indian labour market is not working when many young people, who need jobs most, cannot find them. There is a supply-side problem from the citizens' perspective: not enough jobs are being created.
- Unless employers have the right to fire, they will not hire more workers.
- The thrust of government's policies must be to protect workers' incomes and not to protect jobs which should disappear when industries change.
- Unions, who care only for their own highly paid workers, are the obstacles to labour market reforms, the aim of which must be to benefit workers who are not union members.

More jobs are not being created because employers cannot fire their employees- False argument:

Employers are hiring more workers whenever they need them. They hire them as contract workers or casual workers, and not regular workers whom they would have to pay more. Since contract and casual workers can be easily fired, the inability to fire the workers they hire

Way forward:

- Technologies are changing more rapidly. Also, off-line training institutions cannot keep up. Their trainees do not have the skills needed as employers say. Employers must change their processes, they must provide workers opportunities to learn the new skills necessary. Employers need to show commitment to retain and invest in people.
- The rights of workers, Decent treatment, Fair wages, Adequate social security, must be secured.
- Ensuring social security net. For contract workers, informal sector workers, and even domestic workers. Farmers are demanding better prices for their produce and financial safety nets. The expansion of the social safety net in India, to cover a variety of occupations and enterprises, will have to be the principal thrust of 'labour market' reforms. Employers can be given more freedoms to retrench workers only after strengthening the social safety nets beneath them.

Reforming the laws:

India's labour laws are archaic, too many, often contradictory, and badly administered. They must be reformed. The government is simplifying and consolidating the laws into a few codes. The reformed laws must suit emergent conditions.

- They must provide more flexibility to employers.
- They must ensure fair treatment of workers, and provide a wider social safety net.
- Reforms must be made with consensus amongst workers and their unions, and employers and their associations.
- Trust between workers and employers must be increased.

Conclusion:

Making 'bold' labour reforms, either at the Centre or in the States, to give employers more freedoms to fire workers, may please financial markets for a while, as Thatcher's reforms did in the UK. However, it will weaken the already fraying social compact in India between the elite and workers. India must strengthen the social compact and build a strong industrial base democratically, like Germany and Japan did, with consensus amongst unions and employers.

Connecting the dots:

- It is necessary that a wide social safety net is provided to Indian labour and trust between employers and workers is increased. Discuss.

TOPIC***General Studies 2:***

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

General Studies 3:

- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment*
- *Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies*

Ashok Dalwai committee: Doubling farmer incomes by 2022**Introduction:**

Agriculture has become the new industry and next frontier. The US and EU are currently supporting agriculture the way they promoted industry in the 1930s.

To put it in a nutshell: they are using the latest technology to maximize output, high tariffs to discourage imports and massive subsidies to push exports.

Outsmarting everyone, China has acquired large tracts of land along the proposed “New Silk Road” to grow food and avoid food imports from the US and Oceania.

UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation highlighted that by 2030, most developing countries will be dependent on imports from developed countries for their food requirements.

India must also act with utmost urgency to transform the sector.

Where does India stand?

There is an urgent need to transform India’s agriculture. **Doubling farmers’ income** in next five years can be an apt metaphor and goal for this transformation.

Past strategy for development of the agriculture sector in India has focused primarily on raising agricultural output and improving food security. The net result has been a 45 per cent increase in per person food production, which has made India not only food self-sufficient at aggregate level, but also a net food exporting country.

The strategy did not explicitly recognise the need to raise farmers' income and did not mention any direct measure to promote farmers welfare. The net result has been that farmers income remained low, which is evident from the incidence of poverty among farm households.

Indian agriculture suffers from low productivity, low quality awareness and rising imports.

Reasons/Factors:

- Droughts in 2014-15 reduced agricultural income substantially as over 60% of farming is rain dependent.
- Mechanised farming is not possible in over 65% of land holdings as they are less than one acre in size.
- Most farmers cannot buy quality seeds or expertise as they have little money.

Together these factors resulted in low crop yields or productivity for most farmers.

The collapse of food prices has hurt farmer incomes. Real incomes of farmers have come down by 1.36% a year over the past five years.

A recent report by the Ashok Dalwai committee on doubling farmers' incomes thus deserves attention.

Ashok Dalwai committee on doubling farmers' incomes

According to Dalwai committee, solutions can be categorized into four broad areas:

1. Land
2. Access to markets
3. Increase in productivity and
4. Diversification towards high-yield crops and non-farm activities

I. Land:

- Land holdings in India are small and fragmented, 86% of them being smaller than 2 hectares.
- Holdings are too small for the use of modern implements.
- Farmers have to rely on informal sources of lending and are subject to the vagaries of the weather and volatile prices for their produce.
- Small farmers, who are already very poor, are forced to bear more risk than they would like.

Suggestions and recent actions:

- Encourage contract farming. Much of India's exports and supermarket supplies originate from Contract/Corporate Farming Ventures (CFVs).
- A CFV takes land on lease from a group of farmers and pays an agreed amount and a share of profits to them. Or it may supply inputs and expertise to farmers, supervise production and buy the products.
- The Union government has framed the model agricultural land lease law, 2016 and the draft model contract farming law, 2018 to mitigate these problems.

II. Access to markets:

- Agricultural produce market committees (APMCs) have perpetuated (cause to continue) monopolistic intermediaries.
- In other words, existing agricultural marketing – under the Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMC) – has led to policy distortions and fragmentation, largely as a result of a huge number of intermediaries and poor infrastructure.
- The Ashok Dalwai committee highlighted that - because of the APMC acts, farmers are required to sell a large number of commodities in local mandis where different layers of intermediaries often manipulate the price, thus depriving them of their fair share.

Suggestions and recent actions:

- Union government has introduced a model agricultural produce and livestock marketing (APLM) law, 2017 that is intended to replace the existing APMC Act, and allow a single market within a state, freeing farmers to trade at private wholesale markets, allowing them to sell directly to bulk buyers, and promoting trading on the electronic national agriculture market (eNAM).
- Farmer centres would integrate with the electronic National Agriculture Markets (eNAM) to help farmers sell direct to the consumer.

III. Increase in productivity

- As per the Agriculture Census 2010-11, 67.10% of India's total farmers are marginal farmers (below 1 h.a.) followed by small farmers (1-2 h.a.) at 17.91%.
- Since Indian agriculture is dominated by marginal farmers who have small holdings, raising productivity is likely the single most important factor if incomes of this group are to be doubled.
- Productivity of crops in India is low compared to global standards and there is large variation across states, primarily explained by access to irrigation facilities and adoption of improved technology.

Suggestions and recent actions:

- This requires public investment in irrigation, seeds, fertilizers and other technology. However, successive governments have preferred to give subsidies rather than invest in rural infrastructure.
- Niti Aayog has called for substantive investment in irrigation, seeds & fertilisers and new technology coupled with a shift into high-value commodities such as horticulture, poultry and dairying to double incomes.
- Massive investment is needed in irrigation if productivity of India's farms are to be increased.

IV. Diversification towards high-yield crops and non-farm activities

- Finally, diversification is crucial if farmers' incomes have to increase.

- This is because the average productivity of high-value crops, like vegetables and fruits, is more than Rs1.4 lakh per hectare, compared to Rs40,000 for staple crops.

Suggestions and recent actions:

- Most of the above reforms are the domain of state governments which often protect the interests of large farmers. NITI Aayog has argued for bringing agriculture into the concurrent list so that the Union government can ensure a national market for agricultural products—that may not be a bad idea.

Conclusion:

Doubling agricultural income by 2022 is a mammoth task. It is also one that is the need of the hour. With majority of the country's population dependant on agricultural activities, no true development can be said to be meaningful unless it incorporates the needs of this sector.

Increasing farmer suicide rates and increasingly erratic weather patterns further add to the problem.

The walk to doubling income is a long, tedious one. But a welcome one.

Respectable income in farm sector will also attract youth towards farming profession and ease the pressure on non-farm jobs, which are not growing as per the expectations.

Connecting the dots:

- Doubling Farmer's Income Mindmap: <https://iasbaba.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Doubling-Farmers-Income-IASbaba.jpg>
- Critically analyze the strategies outlined by the Indian government to achieve the target of doubling farmers' income by 2022.
- Instead of relying on subsidies and loan waivers, greater focus on increasing farmers' income would go a long way in addressing agrarian distress in India. Comment.

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

General Studies 2:

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

Credibility of Ease of doing business index in question

In news:

Earlier this month, the World Bank announced that it would revise the methodology it uses to calculate the ease of doing business index, a move that is expected to affect the rankings of countries in the last four years. The decision to revise the methodology comes after the Bank's chief economist Paul Romer raised **concerns that the rankings could have been influenced by politics.**

Chile's overall ranking has see-sawed between 25 and 57 since 2006, going down in periods when Socialist Party was in power, and rising when Conservative was at the helm. Incidentally, India recorded its best-ever improvement in the latest ease of doing business rankings.

What is the ranking about?

The annual report, now in its 15th year, ranks countries on quantitative and qualitative parameters that relate to ease of doing business – such as time to obtain a construction permit; the time, cost and procedures in getting a power connection; ease of getting tax refund and so on.

In broad terms, it is considered a measure of how bad red tape is in a country, and how easy (or difficult) it is to do business.

It's significance:

The ease of doing business index has become a popular tool tracked by governments trying to show the world that they offer a favourable investment climate for private businessmen.

Meanwhile, some critics have pointed to Chile which has seen its ranking fluctuate widely based more on the ideology of the government in power than on underlying business conditions.

Other issues:

- A common criticism of the ranking is that it limits its sample size to just a few major cities, thus projecting an imperfect picture of overall business conditions.
- It can be that governments may be tailoring their policies to specifically fit the World Bank's criteria instead of trying to enact wider structural reforms.
- The bank measures a country's business environment based on written legal rules rather than investigating the actual ground conditions in which businesses operate.

Conclusion:

Given the significance of the rankings, the world bank needs to restore the credibility of the ease of doing business rankings. This can be done by bringing in transparency and bringing certain methodological changes.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the significance of Ease of doing business index. Also mention the criticisms of the rankings.

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.*

India's ailing handloom sector

Introduction:

Today's (26th January 2018) Google Doodle celebrates Republic Day with a colorful artwork, inspired by the vibrant colors and patterns of traditional handloom draperies from different states, depicting parade and cultural dance form.



Pic link: <http://st1.bgr.in/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/India-republic-day-doodle-feat.jpg>

The handloom industry in India exhibits a national identity that is admired and appreciated all over the world given its unique, unparalleled, rich heritage. It exhibits the spectacular craft of our artisans and nourishes the social fabric of the country.

However this handloom art is in crisis.

According to textile ministry's Handlooms Census (2010) –

1. There has been a 33 per cent drop in handloom employment since 1995-96.

2. Only 4.3 million people are engaged in handloom weaving and allied activities now, against 6.5 million in 1995-96.
3. India's handloom exports touched Rs. 2,246 crore in 2014-15. However this has been continually declining compared to the previous 4-5 years.

Since India produces almost 85 per cent of the world's handloom products, we can ill afford to let the handloom sector and handloom art to fall into decline.

Do you know?

- Handloom is the second largest unorganised set of economic activities in the country, after agriculture, that supports rural areas.
- More than three-fourth of all adult weavers are women and members of SC/ST/OBC communities.
- Indian handloom sector has the largest number of weavers in the world.
- There are almost 2.4 million handlooms in India, of which almost 85 per cent are in villages.

Handloom sector in India

Handloom art and weaving centres are clustered all over the country. Many of these art genres are popular in local and international markets.

The Chanderi cluster, for example, is known for its genre of silk garments and sarees . Other clusters include the Varanasi cluster for Banaras silk sarees, and the Chirala cluster for its traditional varieties of zari (golden metal threads) sarees and dhotis.

The Himachali topis, handbags from Kutch, the Kolhapuri chappals, jute bags and silk sarees from Assam - they create a landscape of unity in diversity and cultural parity.

These clusters preserve traditional knowledge, which is passed from one generation to another. The exclusivity and the rarity of these handloom art forms provide them with the much-needed competitive advantage.

Concerns:

We are all aware of the farmer suicides, but tragically enough the death of weavers in the last 20 years has gone unnoticed. For instance, there have been 615 suicides in Andhra Pradesh from 1997-2010 and about 50 in Varanasi in the last three years.

As digital India is the call of the hour, technological advancements are increasingly encouraged in the country and rightly so. Sadly, this impacts the handloom industry negatively and the cut-throat competition from power looms has put the very existence of the handloom sector in doubt.

Many weavers are uneducated and rely solely on their skills that have been passed on to them by their previous generations. This is traditional knowledge for them and it is the government's responsibility to take their concerns and future into account.

The Chanderi Model

The Chanderi town is home to one of the biggest concentrations of handloom weavers in central India. Here they prepare a finely embellished silk and cotton based fabric with woven patterns of zari.

Chanderi has 30,000 inhabitants and about 4,500 active looms. About 60 per cent of the inhabitants are dependent on this centuries-old traditional business either directly or indirectly. The textiles ministry had sanctioned a four-year mega cluster project for Chanderi and the department of rural industries of Madhya Pradesh had also been implementing several schemes aimed at improving the production and marketing of Chanderi products.

Chanderi weavers sell their products across the country at a premium under the brand name of 'Chanderi', which is known for its unique art and designs.

The demand estimation, order generation, and distribution of finished product from Chanderi to different parts of the country is a complex and unstructured process. Weavers use different methods to reach their consumers.

They sell directly to their customers (shopkeepers in other cities) by visiting their place with the products, participate in trade fairs, or sell to intermediaries.

Role of external agencies

The role of NGOs and social enterprises in saving handloom art cannot be overemphasised.

Non-government entities play a crucial role in developing rural entrepreneurial networks for the ailing handloom sector.

For instance, NGO Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) has fulltime operations in Chanderi. DEF created a web portal to help weavers sell their products, going beyond reducing physical market separations and building a bridge to provide market access to their producers.

The Chanderi model has been able to demonstrate the viability of market-based solutions for alleviating the poverty of 'bottom of the pyramid' producers, while also salvaging dying art forms.

Such interventions when done in a timely and appropriate manner can create functional ecosystems of partnerships between the social sector, governments, and poor weavers to successfully develop markets for dying art forms.

Conclusion:

Like any other market, handloom is also required to serve three main functions:

- (1) matching of demand and supply that involves identification of buyers and sellers, for which matchmaking product offerings with needs, as well as price discovery is important;
- (2) facilitating exchanges or transactions, for which logistics, payment mechanisms, and facilitation of credit along with communication between buyers and sellers become important; and
- (3) providing institutional infrastructure such as enforcement of legal and regulatory mechanisms.

These functions are already well-developed in formal urban markets, but the active intervention of external agencies may be required in poor, rural areas to make the markets work efficiently by reducing market separations. External non-governmental agencies can be of great help in undeveloped informal BOP markets in many parts of India.

The budget should aim at improved infrastructure, education and skill-set training to nurture the industry as it looks promising with demands of domestic and export consumption.

Connecting the dots:

- Why handloom sector remains an ailing sector in India? Analyse. What measures are required to solve the challenges faced by the sector?

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

Making Indian Banking Sector Dynamic

Introduction:

The ailing banking sector of India requires immediate attention. A robust and well-capitalized banking sector supports capital formation and economic activity by facilitating intermediation of resources between savers and borrowers. India saves close to 30% of its annual output. Given the importance of the banking sector in the financial system, it has a crucial role to play in channelling these savings to productive investments.

The current banking sector landscape:

- The Indian banking sector is dominated by public sector banks (PSBs) with a market share of roughly 70% of total banking assets.
- There has been little dynamism in the banking sector in recent decades. Since 1991, only 15 licences have been issued to universal banks, a relatively modest number for a fast-growing economy in which the banking system remains an important source of corporate financing.
- PSBs remain the biggest contributors to the large and rising stock of non-performing assets (NPAs), with a share of approximately 90% of the total stock.

Poor health of PSBs:

- Rising NPAs have put a strain on the health of PSBs, reflected in their declining profitability ratios which turned negative in 2016 for the first time in a decade.
- The deteriorating health of PSBs has adversely affected their ability to lend. Within the industrial sector, credit to medium enterprises continues to decline while growth in credit to large enterprises is barely positive.

It will be difficult for the banking system to support high growth, especially in the industrial sector, if the growth in NPAs is not checked.

What needs to be done?

The government has recognized the urgency for broad-ranging banking reforms, but effective implementation and a multi-pronged approach are essential. There has been some progress on improving the institutional and regulatory frameworks needed to support a strong banking system. For instance, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code has improved the legal landscape and should help in speedier recovery of bad loans. The challenge is to make sure it is implemented effectively.

Moving towards a dynamic banking sector:

India should move towards a more dynamic banking sector that fosters innovation and checks the inefficiencies created by a lack of entry.

- Productive reallocation of capital- inefficient banks can be driven out of the system (or merged with other banks) and new banks can enter.
- The policy of “on-tap” licensing of banks is a promising step in the direction of increasing competition in the banking sector. However, some of the conditions, such as initial capital requirements and priority sector lending targets, seem onerous and may fail to attract individual promoters.
- There should be a gradual push towards greater private ownership of ailing PSBs. The argument in favour of PSBs is that they can penetrate unbanked areas where private sector banks do not find it profitable to operate. However, private sector banks should be able to leverage the model of banking correspondents to provide doorstep banking services in rural areas at a reduced cost. Hence, it is time to re-evaluate the benefits of having a banking system dominated by public sector banks and the benefits that greater private ownership can bring.

Increasing the resilience of the banking sector to losses:

It is impossible to eliminate risk completely from any banking system. A sound system should, however, be able to minimize risk.

- Lending standards should be strengthened for lending to sensitive sectors and bigger projects. In addition, there should be enough provisions for expected losses.
- Banks need to have better mechanisms to evaluate the viability of projects when making lending decisions.
- To deal with ex-post losses, there should be a vibrant market for stressed assets so that banks are able to sell their NPAs at a fair price. This can be achieved by increasing participation in the market for stressed assets. Greater competition will lead to a

competitive bidding process and help in better price discovery, potentially reducing the losses suffered by banks owing to haircuts on sales of stressed assets.

Other reforms:

Recapitalization of PSBs is important, but should be done in tandem with other reforms, including-

- Corporate governance reforms to make the incentive structure of the banks consistent with productive allocation of credit.
- Improved financial supervision so that the signs of stress on banks' books can be identified early.
- Development of a vibrant corporate debt market to avoid concentration of credit risk in the banking system.
- Improved debt recovery mechanisms to ensure efficient and speedy recovery of assets.

Conclusion:

Without a strong banking system, the government's vision of making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2025 could remain a pipe dream. Many reforms are being taken to reform banking sector, what is required is effective implementation.

Connecting the dots:

- Given the importance of the banking sector in the financial system, it is required that necessary reforms are undertaken making the sector competitive and dynamic. Discuss.

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

- *Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*
- *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it*
- *Investment and Infrastructure*
- *Agrarian/Rural distress and Rural Development*

Improving rural income

Introduction:

Around two-thirds of India's population is in rural areas and a large proportion of this population lives in abject poverty.

According to the ICE 360° Household Survey conducted in 2016, of the bottom 20% of India's income quintile, 89% live in rural areas.

There is an urgent need to improve the economic scenario in rural India to have a sustainable and robust growth model for the country as a whole.

Issues:

- National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data shows that more than one-fifth of rural households with self-employment in agriculture have income less than the poverty line.
- Agriculture labour productivity in terms of gross value added (GVA) in India is less than a third of that in China and 1% of that in the US.

**Improving agriculture:**

- The productivity (ratio of agriculture output to agriculture inputs) of most crops in India is well below the global average. Farm productivity can be improved through better irrigation facilities, technology improvement, diversifying towards higher value added crops (like fruits, vegetables, spices, condiments), and increasing crop intensity.
- Better price realization for farmers will help in improving income. There needs to be a mechanism in place to ensure that agriculture prices do not fall below the minimum support prices (MSP). For instance, last year we saw the prices of pulses fall below the MSP, causing distress to farmers. In 2016, the government had announced its intention of doubling farmer incomes by 2022.

Focusing on agriculture-allied sectors:

- The livestock sector, which contributes around 4% to India's gross domestic product (GDP), is particularly critical.
- India has a mixed crop livestock farming system, with livestock becoming an important secondary source of income.
- Small and marginal farmers have high dependence on the livestock sector. Hence, measures to boost livestock sector growth and productivity will have a significant impact in alleviating rural distress.

Reducing the dependence on agriculture:

- Rural India does not mean only agriculture and agriculture-allied sectors. Interestingly, the share of agriculture in rural output is 39%, whereas the rest is contributed by the

manufacturing, construction and services sectors. However, a large 64% of rural employment is in the agriculture sector.

- Reducing the dependence of rural masses on agriculture as a source of income will help improve the overall income of the rural population.
- According to a NITI Aayog report, income per farmer is around one-third of the income per non-agriculture worker.

Improving rural employment in the manufacturing and services sectors:

The manufacturing sector in rural India contributes 18% to rural output, but employs only 8% of the rural workforce.

The rural workforce finds it difficult to get absorbed in the manufacturing sector. Improving education facilities and skill development programmes in rural areas will play an important role.

Services sector growth:

The sector can play a critical role in improving rural income. Sectors like transport and storage have recorded reasonable growth in the rural area.

- There is need to further increase the contribution of the services sector to rural output.
- The services sector contributes around 27% to rural output, as against 55% to India's GDP.
- A strong push to sectors like food processing, warehousing and logistics will be very beneficial as it will help push up farmer incomes, reduce the wastage of perishable agriculture commodities and provide employment to rural workers.

Conclusion:

Villages are India's backbone, contributing around 46% to the country's net domestic product and employing 70% of the total workforce.

While it is very critical to increase farmer incomes, it is even more important to increase overall rural incomes. This could be achieved through reducing the over-dependence of the rural population on agriculture as a source of income.

A suitable push needs to be given to infrastructure development and industrial and services sector growth in rural areas.

Imparting skills to the rural workforce appropriately to enable them to get absorbed in the non-agriculture sector is equally important.

Connecting the dots:

- Around two-thirds of India's population is in rural areas and a large proportion of this population lives in abject poverty. Improving rural income thus must be a priority for the government. Suggest measures to do so.

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.*
- *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it*
- *Investment and Infrastructure*
- *Agrarian/Rural distress and Rural Development*

Transforming Indian agriculture through Corporate farming ventures

Introduction:

Despite serious attempts, improving farm productivity on a large scale remains our most significant challenge. It is time to think of alternative models for the rapid development of agriculture.

Pooling resources and engaging in systematic, collaborative farming, with initial support from external agencies is the way.

Major reasons for low farm output are:

- Low land unit sizes.
- High dependence on rain.
- Poverty which prevents the use of appropriate seeds, fertilisers, and insecticides.
- The farm-to-market linkage is also weak.

How it works?

Land on lease is taken from a group of farmers.

Expert firms then use the best inputs and technology to grow and market produce that meets the highest quality standards.

This model may supplement the existing government schemes, and can be implemented in a two-step process.

- In step one, the ministry of agriculture in consultation with State governments can identify 100 contiguous pieces of land, 500 sq km each. These will be called Agriculture Development Regions (ADRs).

State governments will need to persuade farmers within each such region to agree to lease their land to them for 10 years.. Ownership of the land will remain with the farmers.

- State governments can then invite corporate farming ventures (CFVs) to work on each of the ADRs. In return, they will pay the money that State governments owe the farmers.

This means zero financial burden on State governments. CFVs may employ local farmers by giving them wages.

CFVs will be applying modern techniques and will be investing to get high-quality products.

Significance of CFVs

- Today, the Government does not have enough resources to reach the last farmer. CFVs by investing money can create islands of excellence. The best practices will then spread to adjoining areas.
- CFVs have reported higher yields for most crops. These include wheat, rice, sugar, cotton, potato, gherkin, tomato, groundnut, safflower, marigold, safflower, poultry and milk. Much of India's exports originate from the CFVs' baskets. They have already proved that agriculture can be profitable. CFVs today engage with lakhs of farmers across the country.
- CFVs also understand the importance of maintaining product quality and supply-chain integrity. They know that many countries do not accept India's agriculture produce as they do not meet the prescribed quality or health and safety standards. Thus, they invest in good agricultural practices such as maintaining specified standards in pesticides residue levels, assaying, grading, packaging, and storage.
- They understand the technology and investment needs of the sector. They can reduce the cost of cultivation by 25 to 30 per cent by using laser land levellers, and precision seeders in combination with the residue management.
- CFVs know the importance of farm-to-fork supply chains. For perishables goods like fruits and vegetables, this means transportation in refrigerated vans after pre-cooling of produce. Most farmers cannot afford these. The Government may help CFVs with tax breaks on these investments.

Examples of CFVs:

PepsiCo in Punjab and eight other states, Hindustan Lever, Rallis, and ICICI jointly in Madhya Pradesh, Amul and NDDB in Gujrat, Sugarcane Cooperatives in Maharashtra, and Suguna in Tamil Nadu, are important CFVs.

Way ahead:

Hundreds of CFVs are already successful in India, but in isolated pockets. We need to use their expertise on a large scale with the help of the Government.

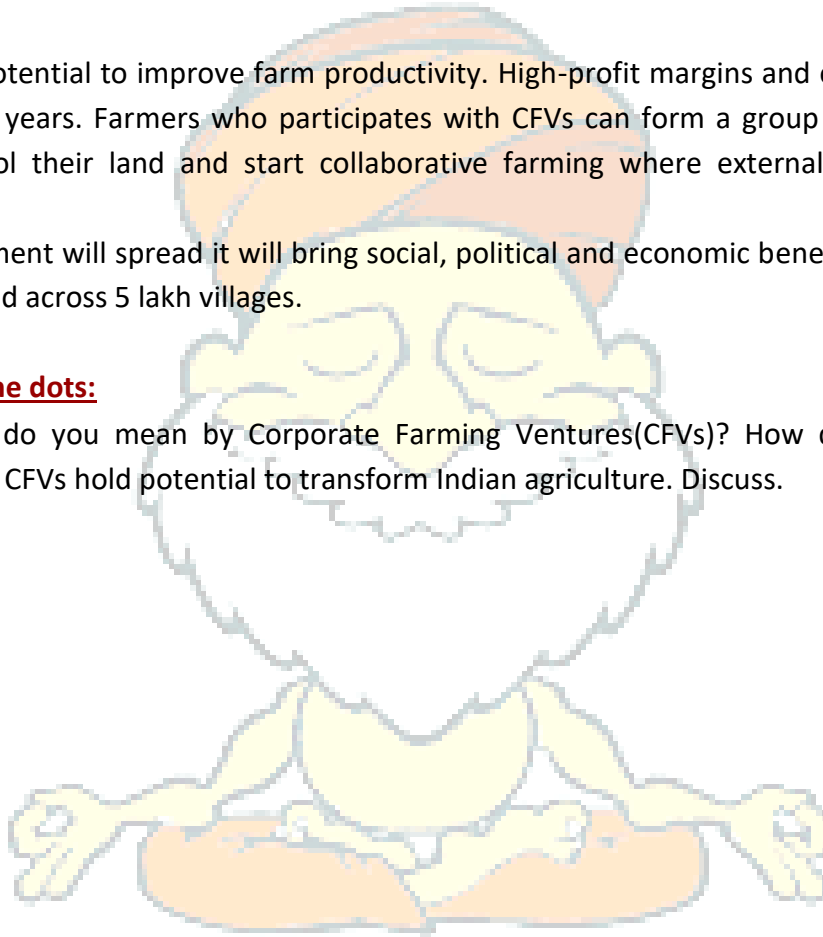
Conclusion:

CFVS holds potential to improve farm productivity. High-profit margins and exports will follow. Within a few years. Farmers who participate with CFVs can form a group within the village. They will pool their land and start collaborative farming where external CFVs will not be needed.

As the movement will spread it will bring social, political and economic benefits to the 50 crore farmers spread across 5 lakh villages.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by Corporate Farming Ventures(CFVs)? How do these ventures work? CFVs hold potential to transform Indian agriculture. Discuss.



GOVERNANCE AND INTERNAL SECURITY

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability and institutional and other measures.*

General Studies 3:

- *Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate*

Police Complaints Authority (PCA): It's time to have on in each State/UT

In news:

Recently, Delhi High Court has asked the Centre and Delhi government to finalise a scheme for a Police Complaints Authority (PCA) for the national capital by January 2018. While Delhi Police routinely tops the charts in the number of complaints against police personnel, residents have been denied an effective and independent body to respond to their complaints.

Background:

In 2006, the Supreme Court (SC) ordered all states and Union Territories to set up PCAs as one of seven directives to usher in police accountability.

What would be the role of PCA?

A PCA is intended to be a free-standing, absolutely independent adjudicator with diverse membership, intended to act as a remedy for the public and a corrective mechanism for the police. In the court's scheme, a PCA is envisaged as a body to **address complaints filed by the public against police officials** in cases ranging from custodial death, torture, illegal detention, and even land grabbing.

Present setup:

Complaints authorities are to be set up at both the state and district levels and their recommendations should be binding.

In 2012, the Delhi government with the approval of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), extended the mandate of the existing Public Grievances Commission (PGC) in the city to

respond to complaints against the police. At present, there are individuals who act “as the PCA” within the PGC. This is in violation of the court’s directive.

Issues and Way ahead:

A memo issued by the MHA directing the setting up of PCAs in the Union Territories. The MHA’s memo is in violation of the court’s directive with several gaps impeding both the independence and potential effectiveness of the agency.

- Delhi police is among the largest police departments in the country with a 82,000-strong force. The MHA’s memo sets up a single complaints authority for Delhi, presumably with jurisdiction over all complaints and police ranks. But a single-window PCA for Delhi simply cannot work given the scale of the metropolis and the volume of complaints against the police.

SOLution- One PCA at the city-level to inquire into complaints against police officers of and above the rank of deputy commissioner of police, and a complaints authority at each of the six ranges to receive complaints against police officers of and below the rank of assistant commissioner of police. At both levels, their mandates should cover both serious misconduct and lesser misconduct, properly defined and delineated.

- The MHA memo neglects to lay down a selection process to select the chair and members of the PCA. This contravenes the court’s prescription of an independent selection panel to shortlist candidates to avoid politicised appointments. **Solution-** The process has to be participatory and transparent with an independent selection panel. The process can be made transparent by advertising vacancies inviting applications from eligible candidates.
- The memo is also silent on providing independent investigators for the PCA — this is needed to keep the complaints authority at arm’s length from both the police and the government.
- The memo dilutes the binding nature of the PCA’s final orders by empowering the administrator — in this case, Delhi’s Lieutenant Governor — to overturn the PCA’s orders in the case of disagreement. Allowing the administrator the leeway to reverse or amend its decisions, when he is also directly in charge of the Delhi Police, dilutes the PCA’s efficiency and creates a de facto appeals body.

Holding an inclusive public consultation with citizens of Delhi, on the PCA they want, would be important.

Connecting the dots:

- A memo has been issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs directing the setting up of Police Complaints Authorities (PCAs) in the Union Territories. This has been done based on the directive given by Supreme court in 2006. Discuss the issues with the memo and way ahead.

TOPIC**General Studies 2:**

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

The Issue of Government being biggest litigant**Introduction:**

The government is the biggest litigant in India. According to the Ministry of Law and Justice, government departments are a party to around “46 percent” of court cases. There is a need to explore ways of addressing this issue. The solutions to the issue that have been proposed so far have failed to understand the underlying causes.

Reasons behind government being biggest litigant:

- **Friction between citizens and the government:** The writ jurisdiction vested in High Courts under Article 226 of the Constitution enables an ordinary citizen to access the highest court in her State to address grievances against any authority, including any government, for violation of any of her fundamental or other rights. The number and nature of writ petitions filed before a High Court are indicative of the extent of friction between citizens and the government. A data shows that writ petitions constitute nearly 60% of all fresh cases filed before the Karnataka High Court.
- Lack of inbuilt grievance redressal mechanisms and of an effective social audit.
- Poor coordination between various departments of the government.

Cause of concern:

- It creates a huge load on the judiciary which spends its maximum time in tackling cases where the government is a party increasing the spending and aggravating the issue of long pendency of cases.
- Large number of cases against the government is not a positive sign of good governance.
- Flaws in policy addressing the issue- A misconception regarding government litigation is that the government itself is a source of all cases involving the government. Existing policies attempt to address the issue of “government being a compulsive litigant” and do not consider cases where the government is a respondent. A survey shows that only 7.4% of fresh cases filed before the court in 2014 were by the Central government.

Way forward: Any attempt at resolving the issue of “government litigation” must be based on the premise that the government in India functions in so many myriad forms that a one-size-fits-all approach to deal with the issue is impossible.

- The analysis of petitions filed against the state at various levels of governance shows that a multi-pronged approach needs to be adopted to tackle the issue of “government litigation”, depending on the kind of litigation. For example, to reduce writ petitions filed under service and labour classifications, the state must put in place robust internal dispute resolution mechanisms within each department which inspire confidence in its workers as a means of addressing their grievances against the management.
- While the Centre has so far failed to finalise the litigation policy, several states have gone ahead with their respective policies based on the 2010 draft of the Law Ministry.
- A revised litigation policy with clear objectives, must enumerate the role of different functionaries, list out the minimum standards for pursuing litigation, establish fair accountability mechanisms, provide the consequences for violation and should factor in a periodic impact assessment programme.
- A mechanism to scrutinize the cases “which need to be contested and which not to be contested” should be established. In Jammu and Kashmir, former chief minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had devised a nucleus system within law department to prevent cases from going to the court. A similar system can be put in other states as well at Centre to decide whether a case is fit to contest in the court or not.
- The mindset that matters should be left to the courts for any final decision, should be discarded.
- The departments should know the real number of litigations the government is involved in. Without such data on cases, their nature and expenditure, it is difficult to work on remedy.
- We need to find solutions unique to each litigation-prone department.

Conclusion:

So far, the policies aimed at addressing the supply-side issues of government litigations are found to be lacking in data, research and analysis. What is needed is an implementable action plan to ensure that citizens are not forced to file cases against the government and its agencies in the first place. This will require a relook at the functioning of litigation-prone departments and formulating solutions unique to each department.

Connecting the dots:

- The government is the biggest litigant in India. Discuss the reasons behind and state why is it a cause of concern. Also suggest remedial measures.

ENVIRONMENT

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:

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

Soil and Climate Change

Introduction:

- Policy makers have long failed to recognize the importance of soil in the context of tackling climate change.
- Policies are usually focussed on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the electricity sector, transport and industry.
- However, recently there has been a renewed interest in understanding how soils can serve as a sink for carbon dioxide.

Soil holds potential to slow global warming

Significant carbon pools on earth are found in the earth's crust, oceans, atmosphere and land-based ecosystems. Among them, soil should be viewed as a potential resource in response to tackling climate change as it is the second largest carbon pool after the oceans.

- Soils contain roughly 2,344 Gt (1 gigatonne = 1 billion tonnes) of organic carbon, making this the largest terrestrial pool.
- Therefore, if managed well, soil's ability to trap carbon dioxide is potentially much greater and could "significantly" offset increasing global emissions.
- Carbon sequestration in soils has the potential to offset GHG emissions from fossil fuels by up to 15% annually.

Focus on increasing soil's carbon storage

Organic matter in soil comes from plants, animals, microbes, leaves and wood, mostly found in the first metre or so.

Unfortunately, the carbon in soil has been widely lost or degraded through land use changes and unsustainable forest and agricultural practices, fires, nitrogen deposition and other human activities.

For instance, in India carbon in soil has reduced from 30% to 60% in cultivated soils compared with soils that are not disturbed.

The greatest near-term threat comes when permafrost starts to melt in Earth's northern reaches, which could release massive amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.

There are many conditions and processes that determine changes to soil organic carbon content including temperature, rainfall, vegetation, soil management and land-use change.

- Improving how the land is managed could increase soil's carbon storage enough to offset future carbon emissions from thawing (melting) permafrost.
- About 70 percent of all sequestered carbon in the top meter of soil is in lands directly affected by agriculture, grazing or forest management.
- Among the possible approaches: reduced tillage, increasing organic farming, year-round sustainable livestock grazing, manure and compost application, reducing erosion by allowing roots to reach deeper into the ground, increased agro-forestry practices and planting more perennial crops – could store more carbon.

Retaining and restoring soil organic matter can improve soil health, agricultural yield, food security, water quality, and reduce the need for chemicals.

Changing agricultural practices to make them more sustainable would not just address carbon mitigation but also improve other planetary boundaries in peril such as fresh water, biodiversity, land use and nitrogen use.

Conclusion:

Currently, the world is on a path to be about 3° C warmer than pre-Industrial times even if there was follow through on all the commitments made at the Paris climate conference in 2015.

Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide have crossed 410 parts per million and oceans have turned acidic.

India's population will continue to increase through at least the middle of the century and we need to be able to grow more food, grown in less land and in more severe weather conditions.

There is little policy support for natural farming and sustainable farming practices. This can be witnessed in policies like Green Revolution – where the use of chemicals — pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers – are encouraged.

Implementing the recommendations of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture which suggested for “revision of the existing fertilizer subsidy policy and promotion of organic fertilizers” will help.

The ability of soils to sequester carbon is a win-win strategy for farmers, people and for climate change and it is time policy makers stop ignoring these at the policy levels. There is an urgent need to better understand and manage our soils.

Connecting the dots:

- Taking care of the planet's soil is "critical for stabilizing atmospheric CO₂ concentrations". Comment.
- Examine the role of Soil as a potential resource to offset GHG emissions.



ENERGY SECURITY

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

- *Technology, Energy Security*
- *Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.*

Generating energy through nuclear fusion: Challenges

Background:

Power generation through fusion reaction has been one of the most attractive fields of nuclear research and has consequently seen considerable investment since the middle of the last century.

While the world has been awaiting a breakthrough in an affordable and clean power source for long, nuclear fusion has always been seen, since the 1950s, as the energy source that was 50 years away from commercial availability and would always remain so.

In recent years, however, it seems we are getting very close to the first real goals of harnessing this energy, i.e., working prototypes of fusion reactors.

Advanced technologies and supercomputing have remarkably accelerated the pace of R&D in this field, which has probably led to the recent confident claims.

Nuclear fusion technology:

- In nuclear fusion, various isotopes of hydrogen are fused together to form a new element, helium.
- In the process, a small amount of matter is converted into heat energy, as in the case of nuclear fission.
- This energy is enormous and could be harnessed.
- But the temperature required for nuclear fusion to occur is in the range of 13 million degrees centigrade.

No material can withstand such high temperatures. Hydrogen fusion experiments are therefore presently being carried out in apparatuses called '**Tokamaks**' (toroidal plasma chambers), where the hydrogen in extremely hot plasma form is fused together while being suspended away from the walls of the apparatus using extremely strong magnetic fields.

Challenge:

- The problems in achieving successful nuclear fusion have mainly related to sustaining the reaction for long durations and plasma containment.
- The moment the plasma comes into contact with any other material in the tokamak, it immediately loses heat and the temperature required to be maintained comes down drastically, stopping the reaction.
- At present, it has been possible to stably hold the plasma in the tokamak only for a few seconds or at best a few minutes. Large amounts of input energy are also required for the experimental apparatus to work and to sufficiently raise the temperature of the plasma for the fusion reaction to start.
- In all the experimentation conducted till date, it has not proved possible to obtain a higher output of fusion energy than the input energy. The best output to input energy ratio has been 65 per cent.
- For fusion to become a viable source of energy generation, the reaction will have to be sustained for long durations and output energy will have to be many times greater than input energy. Though research is being carried out at almost 200 tokamaks worldwide, including the famous International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), none is envisaging imminent breakthroughs as in the case of compact fusion, even though some successes have been recently achieved in boosting the energy output tenfold. India is also a prominent participant in the ITER programme.

International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER):

- **ITER** is an international nuclear fusion research and engineering megaproject, which will be the world's largest magnetic confinement plasma physics experiment. It is an experimental tokamak nuclear fusion reactor that is being built in southern France.
- The machine aims to demonstrate the principle of producing more thermal power from the fusion process than is used to heat the plasma, something that has not yet been achieved in any fusion reactor.
- The project is funded and run by seven member entities—the European Union, India, Japan, China, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. The EU, as host party for the ITER complex, is contributing about 45 percent of the cost, with the other six parties contributing approximately 9 percent each.

Positives:

- Entities working on compact fusion also claim that their technology will avert the major environmental impacts of global warming, expected by 2050.

The positive climate mitigating impact of such technologies would, however, depend on the economic viability of fusion energy, which, in turn, would depend on the costs of reactors, cost of materials, complexity of technology, access to technology, product patenting, etc.

- Cost effective fusion reactors would be able to provide practically limitless power for all the needs of mankind from domestic to industrial supply to desalination of sea water without environmental degradation and further energize pollution control mechanisms.
- It is safe and cannot lead to the making of a fusion bomb.
- There would be no danger of accidents similar to Chernobyl as a runaway fusion reaction is intrinsically impossible and any malfunction would result in a rapid shutdown of the plant.
- Research being undertaken in fields of energy storage, especially vis-à-vis battery technology, are also showing encouraging results. High-capacity battery technology would form a perfect partner with compact fusion technology in providing clean energy in the future.
- Fusion does not generate long-lived radioactive products and the unburned gases can be treated on site.

While there would a short-to-medium term radioactive waste problem due to the activation of structural materials. Some component materials will become radioactive during the lifetime of a reactor, and will eventually become radioactive waste. The quantity of such waste is, however, likely to be insignificantly small.

Disruptive potential of fusion energy:

- The greatest and immediate hit of attaining success in harnessing fusion energy is likely to be on oil prices. FOil prices probably would similarly plummet if and when the fusion experiment succeeds. As such, global oil demand is predicted to see a downtrend beyond 2025.
- Even other energy investments such as in wind, solar, coal, etc. could suffer major setbacks.

Issue:

The technology would be under strict US or UK governmental controls for many years or even decades to follow, as these are the nations which are making investments in fusion experiments. The percolation of fusion technology to other nations in all likelihood would, therefore, be at very carefully measured rates for the next two to three decades. Besides, since compact fusion would be solely their creation, Western companies and governments are likely to exploit it for profits for many years to come. Thus, even if this technology has the potential to take care of all of mankind's energy needs it will not be so in near time.

Indian context:

India has its own plasma research experimental tokamaks called '**Aditya**' and **SST-1** at the Institute of Plasma Research, Gujarat, for conducting fusion research. These have given invaluable experience to Indian scientists because of which they have found a prominent place in the ITER project.

India has not ventured into compact fusion research so far.

In view of the various recent developments in compact fusion, India also needs to carefully tread forward in the energy sector, especially when getting into long-term contracts for power generation.

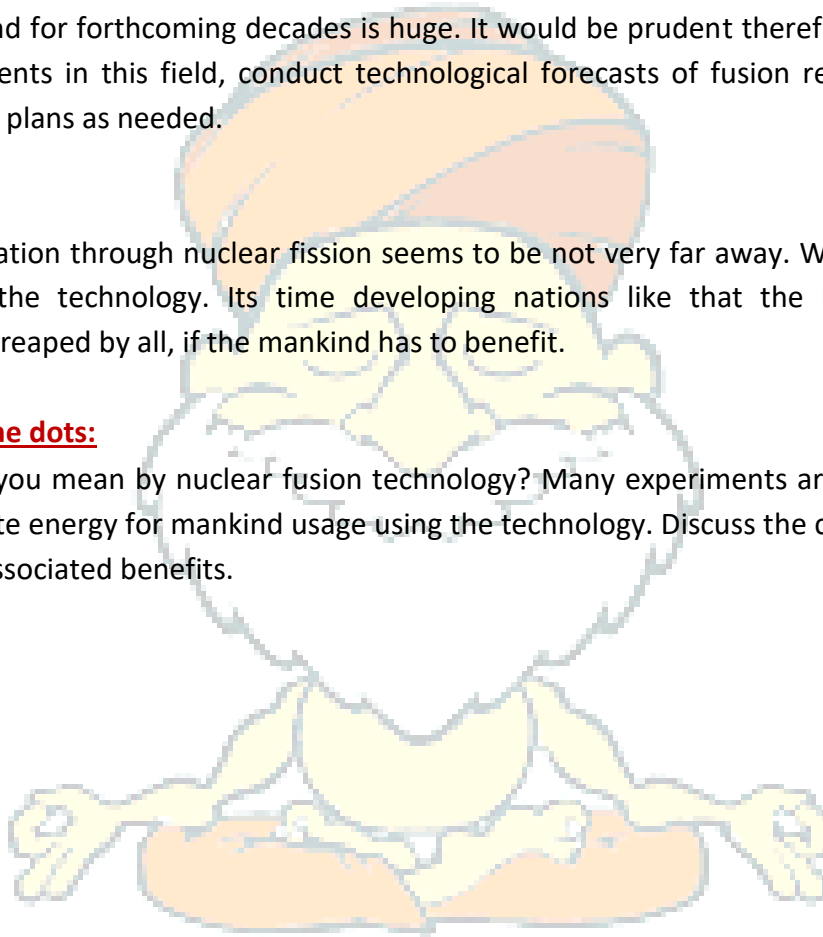
India's demand for forthcoming decades is huge. It would be prudent therefore to keep an eye on developments in this field, conduct technological forecasts of fusion research and revisit future energy plans as needed.

Conclusion:

Energy generation through nuclear fission seems to be not very far away. Western nations are investing in the technology. Its time developing nations like that the benefit of such a technology is reaped by all, if the mankind has to benefit.

Connecting the dots:

- What do you mean by nuclear fusion technology? Many experiments are going worldwide to generate energy for mankind usage using the technology. Discuss the challenges involved and the associated benefits.



PRELIMS FOCUS

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY): Making 'Housing for all' a reality by 2022

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.

Key pointers:

- The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has recently expanded its scope to cater to the housing needs of the mid-income group, besides the economically weaker sections (EWS) and low-income group (LIG). The scheme originally was meant to cover people in the EWS and LIG sections, but now covers the mid-income group (MIG) as well.
- The government envisages building affordable *pucca* houses with water facility, sanitation and electricity supply round-the-clock.
- PMAY comprises four key aspects. One, it aims to transform slum areas by building homes for slum dwellers in collaboration with private developers. Two, it plans to give a credit-linked subsidy to weaker and mid income sections on loans taken for new construction or renovation of existing homes. Three, the Centre will chip in with financial assistance for affordable housing projects done in partnership with States/Union Territories for the EWS. Four, it will extend direct financial assistance of Rs. 1.5 lakh to EWS.

The country is estimated to have a shortage of nearly 20 million housing units needed by the rural and urban poor. The PMAY aims to address this shortfall.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/all-you-wanted-to-know-about-pmay/article10007101.ece>

Arunachal Pradesh declared Open Defecation Free state

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:

- Arunachal Pradesh emerged as the second State in the Northeast, after Sikkim, to be declared Open Defecation Free.

- Arunachal has 21 districts and the State attained the feat much before the national deadline of October 2, 2019.
- The project undertaken under Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) SBM (G) saw the light of day only after the State government extended an incentive of Rs 8,000 per toilet. This is in addition to the Centre's support of Rs 12,000, raising the grant for constructing a toilet to Rs 20,000.
- The State government also launched Swachh Arunachal Mission on October 2 this year at Tawang which envisaged the Swachh Protocol (Cleanliness Protocol) aimed at ensuring sustainability of assets created under SBM (Gramin).

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/arunachal-declared-open-defecation-free-state/article22340774.ece>

Indian women can go on haj without male companion

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Social issues

Key pointers:

- In his last Mann Ki Baat address of the year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to Muslim women, highlighting his government's attempt at facilitating women's travel for Haj pilgrimage without a male companion.
- Even in many Islamic countries this practice does not exist.
- According to the Ministry of Minority Affairs, now Muslim women aged above 45 will be allowed to go for the pilgrimage without 'mahram' in a group of at least four.
- The PM said removal of the restriction of having a male guardian or 'mahram' may appear as a "small thing", but such issues "have a far reaching impact on our image as a society".

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/muslim-women-can-travel-for-haji-without-male-guardian-pm/article22338705.ece>

Photovoltaic Highway in China

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:

- China successfully tested its first photovoltaic highway based on home-grown technology in the country's eastern Shandong province.
- The road has wireless charging systems for electric vehicles.

- The road is constructed using solar panels which have a thin sheet of clear concrete on top of them, protecting the surface.
- The panels were built to transfer energy to electric vehicles passing on top of them.
- The stretch has three layers. At the bottom is an insulator to prevent moisture from getting to the photovoltaic devices in the middle layer, and on top is the layer of transparent concrete.
- The tested segment of highway can generate 817.2 KW of power and is expected to generate 1 million KW hours of electricity each year. The electricity generated will be connected to China's national power grid.
- China has become the second country to construct a photovoltaic highway. France was introduced the world's first photovoltaic road fitted with solar panels in late 2016.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/technology/photovoltaic-road-tested-in-china/article22328386.ece>

Ujh Multi-purpose Project

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- Looking to fast-track utilisation of India's rights under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), the Central Water Commission (CWC) has finalised a detailed report on Ujh multi-purpose project.
- The proposal aims to harness water that was flowing untapped across the border.
- The project, which is to come up in Kathua district, will store water from Ujh (**a tributary of Ravi**) to irrigate produce power.

Background:

- The government decided to take a relook at the implementation of the Indus treaty. The decision was taken following the attack by Pakistan-backed terrorists on the Army camp at Uri in 2016.
- An inter-ministerial task force was formed to examine the IWT with Pakistan. The Ujh project is a step towards India's utilisation of waters of the Indus and its tributaries in keeping with its rights under the treaty.
- Under the IWT, signed with Pakistan in 1960, waters of Ravi are allocated to India.

Article link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-sets-the-ball-rolling-on-its-rights-under-indus-waters-treaty-prepares-dpr-for-ujh-project-in-jk/articleshow/62298262.cms>

Cryptocurrencies: Ponzi Scheme

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Key pointers:

- The Finance Ministry expressed concern about spurt in the prices of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies and likening them to Ponzi schemes.
- An official statement said- “VCs don’t have any intrinsic value and are not backed by any kind of assets. The price of bitcoin and other VCs is entirely a matter of speculation resulting in spurt and volatility in their prices.”
- The Finance Ministry’s position regarding taxation of gains on cryptocurrency trade is still unclear.

Issues:

- The government said VC transactions are encrypted and are likely being used for terror-funding, smuggling, drug trafficking and money laundering.
- The Ministry said VCs are not reliable as they are stored in digital/electronic format, making them vulnerable to hacking and malware attack.
- VCs are not backed by government fiat” and are not legal tender. VCs are neither currencies nor coins, and the government or the RBI has not authorised them as a medium of exchange

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/money-and-banking/government-puts-bitcoin-in-ponzi-scheme-basket/article10005234.ece>

The ‘Electoral Bonds’ scheme

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Salient features of the Representation of People’s Act

Key pointers:

- The electoral bonds will be a bearer instrument in the nature of a Promissory Note and an interest-free banking instrument.
- A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India will be eligible to purchase the bond. The bonds can be purchased for any value in multiples of Rs. 1,000; Rs. 10,000; Rs. 1 lakh; Rs.10 lakh; and Rs. 1 crore.

- The bonds **will not carry the name of the payee** and will be valid only for 15 days during which it can be used to make a **donation only to certain political parties**.
- To benefit from the electoral bonds scheme, the political parties must have been registered with the Election Commission and should have secured not less than 1 per cent of the votes polled in the most recent General Election to the Lok Sabha or a State legislative assembly.
- The bonds can be encashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with an authorised bank.

How to donate to parties

Electoral bonds will be available for purchase for 10 days each in the months of January, April, July and October

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Such bonds can be purchased by any Indian citizen or a body incorporated in India | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchaser must pay from KYC-compliant bank account |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be bought for any amount in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh, and ₹1 crore | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bonds will not carry the name of the payee and will be valid for 15 days |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can only be bought from specified SBI branches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be used for donation to a registered political party only |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can be encashed only through that party's bank account |



Pic credit: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article22355504.ece/alternates/FREE_660/02NDSRN01ElectGLE35NTCT1jpg.jpg

Key benefits:

- It seeks to ensure the flow of clean money to political parties, without revealing the donors' names.
- The fact that neither the donor nor the donee is known (under the electoral bonds scheme) means people will be free to donate to any political party of their choice, he said.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/the-name-is-bond-electoral-bond/article10009130.ece>

One-fourth of world's land may become arid

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Key pointers:

- Over a quarter of the world's land could become significantly drier even if global warming is limited to the target of two degree Celsius, according to scientists including one of Indian origin.
- Researchers from U.K. and China studied projections from 27 global climate models to arrive at above conclusion.
- Aridity is a measure of the dryness of the land surface, obtained from combining precipitation and evaporation.
- "Aridification is a serious threat because it can critically impact areas such as agriculture, water quality, and biodiversity. It can also lead to more droughts and wildfires.
- But two thirds of the affected regions could avoid significant aridification if warming is limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/warming-may-turn-quarter-of-earth-arid/article22353657.ece>

"Nari": The National Repository of Information for Women

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Key pointers:

- In order to make information on all government schemes and initiatives for women more easily accessible, the Ministry for Women Child and Development launched a new web platform - "Nari".
- The National Repository of Information for Women summarises over 350 schemes and other important information benefiting women.
- Nari is a niche initiative by the WCD Ministry to list all the central and state-specific schemes. The platform will provide information to women on issues affecting their lives.
- Nari will provide links to the Ministries, departments and autonomous bodies offering the schemes as well as easy access to online applications and grievance redressal.
- The website will have tips on good nutrition, suggestions for health check-ups, information on major diseases, tips for job search and interview, investment and savings advice. Besides, information on crimes against women and reporting procedures.
- It will also have contacts of legal aid cells, simplified adoption procedures and many other facilities.

- It will endow women with the power of information to build their life skills and facilitate them in taking full advantage of the services provided by the government.

Article link: <http://www.news18.com/news/tech/nari-one-portal-for-all-government-schemes-for-women-1620703.html>

Zoji La Tunnel: Between Ladakh and Kashmir

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- The cabinet approved the construction of a 14.2 km tunnel in Zoji La, to provide all-weather connectivity between Ladakh and Kashmir, while also giving a strategic edge to the armed forces in the region.
- The project, said to be Asia's longest bi-directional tunnel, is estimated to cost Rs 6,809-crore.
- Situated at an altitude of 11,578 feet on the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh National Highway, Zoji La remains closed from December to April due to heavy snowfall and avalanches, cutting off the Ladakh region from Kashmir.
- This project, along with other ongoing projects like the 6.5 km long Z-Morh tunnel at Gagangir, would ensure safe, fast and cheap connectivity between the two regions of Kashmir and Ladakh.

Significance:

- The project, on completion, would lead to enormous boost in employment as local businesses will get linked to the national market and the beautiful region is able to receive round-the-year tourist traffic.
- The region of Ladakh remains cut off from the rest of the country during the winter months due to heavy snowfall. The tunnel will provide all-weather connectivity to Ladakh region.
- It will also be of strategic value to the armed forces.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/govt-approves-zojila-tunnel-project-jammu-kashmir-leh-ladakh-connectivity-winters-5010221/>

Jal Marg Vikas Project

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the more than ₹5,369 crore Jal Marg Vikas Project for development of fairway on National Waterway-1 with the technical and investment support of the World Bank.
- The project will extend over Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- The project is expected to be completed by March 2023.

Significance:

- The project will provide alternative mode of transport that will be environment friendly and cost effective.
- The project would contribute in bringing down the logistics cost in the country while providing a boost to infrastructure development.
- The NW-1 development and operations will lead to direct employment generation to the tune of 46,000 and indirect employment of 84,000 will be generated by vessel construction industry.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had announced JMVP in Budget Speech of July 2014, with an aim to enable commercial navigation of at least 1,500 tonnes vessels in Ganga.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/business/centre-approves-5369-cr-for-waterway-project/article22360592.ece>

Exclusive Human Rights Courts

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Social Issues

Key pointers:

- The human rights law of 1993 makes States responsible for setting up exclusive human rights courts with special public prosecutors in every district.
- But till now not a single State has done it.
- The Supreme Court recently asked States why exclusive [human rights](#) courts had not been set up yet.
- In the light of the rampant problem of orphanages trafficking children under their care, the Court decided to step in to protect the dignity of the child.
- “The future of the country depends on our children. States have a great role to play... It is necessary to have a comprehensive view regarding the running of orphanages, mode and method of adoptions, care given to children in these institutions, treatment meted out to the children,” the Supreme Court observed.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/why-no-exclusive-human-rights-courts-yet-supreme-court-asks-states/article22367101.ece>

Pakistan on 'special watch list' for 'severe violations of religious freedom'

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- The United States of America has put Pakistan on its 'special watch list' for 'severe violations of religious freedom'.
- Around ten other nations have been listed as 'Countries of Particular Concern' by the US.
- Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have been listed as Countries of Particular Concern, and Pakistan as part of a Special Watch List for severe violations of religious freedom".
- The United States Secretary of State annually designates governments, which have undertaken or allowed measures to violate religious freedom, as 'Countries of Particular Concern' observing the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.
- The government of Pakistan continues to perpetrate and tolerate systematic, ongoing, religious freedom violations. Religiously discriminatory constitutional provisions and legislation, such as the country's blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya laws, continue to result in prosecutions and imprisonments.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/pakistan-on-us-special-watch-list-for-violations-of-religious-freedom-5011926/>

Iceland become first country to legalise equal pay

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International developments

Key pointers:

- A new law making it illegal to pay men more than women has taken effect in Iceland.
- The legislation makes Iceland the first country in the world to legalise equal pay between men and women.
- Under the new rules, companies and government agencies employing at least 25 people will have to obtain government certification of their equal-pay policies.
- Iceland, an island country in the North Atlantic Ocean that is home to approximately 323,000 people, has a strong economy, based on tourism and fisheries.
- For the past nine years, it has been ranked by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as the world's most gender-equal country.

- The Icelandic government plans to completely eradicate the wage gap by 2020.

Global Gender Gap Report: World Economic Forum

- The Global Gender Gap Report uses markers such as economic opportunity, political empowerment, and health and survival to gauge the state of gender equality in a country.
- The report began in 2006. , Iceland has closed around 10 percent of its total gender gap, making it one of the fastest-improving countries in the world.

Gender inequality worldwide

- According to the latest WEF report, the top five best performers in the global gender gap are Iceland, [Norway](#), Finland, Rwanda and Sweden.
- Yemen, on the other hand, is currently the lowest-ranked of the 144 countries measured in the report.
- Hungary was the only European country to be ranked lower than the global average, having scored poorly on political empowerment.

Article link: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/iceland-country-legalise-equal-pay-180101150054329.html>

United States suspends security assistance to Pakistan

Part of: GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- The United States has suspended more than \$1.15 billion security assistance to Pakistan, accusing Islamabad of harbouring terror groups like the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network within its border and showing unwillingness to take “decisive actions” against them.
- The freezing of all security assistance to Pakistan comes days after President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of providing “safe haven” to terrorists.
- Prominent among the suspended amount include \$255 million in Foreign Military Funding (FMF) for the fiscal year 2016 as mandated by the Congress. In addition, the Department of Defense has suspended the entire \$900 million of the Coalition Support Fund (CSF) money to Pakistan for the fiscal year 2017.
- The U.S. will now not be delivering military equipment or transfer security-related funds to Pakistan unless it is required by law.
- The action is not irreversible. All the funding will be available to Pakistan, if it undertake to take adequate measures against terrorism.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-suspends-over-11-bn-security-assistance-to-pakistan/article22372751.ece>

Decelerating Growth

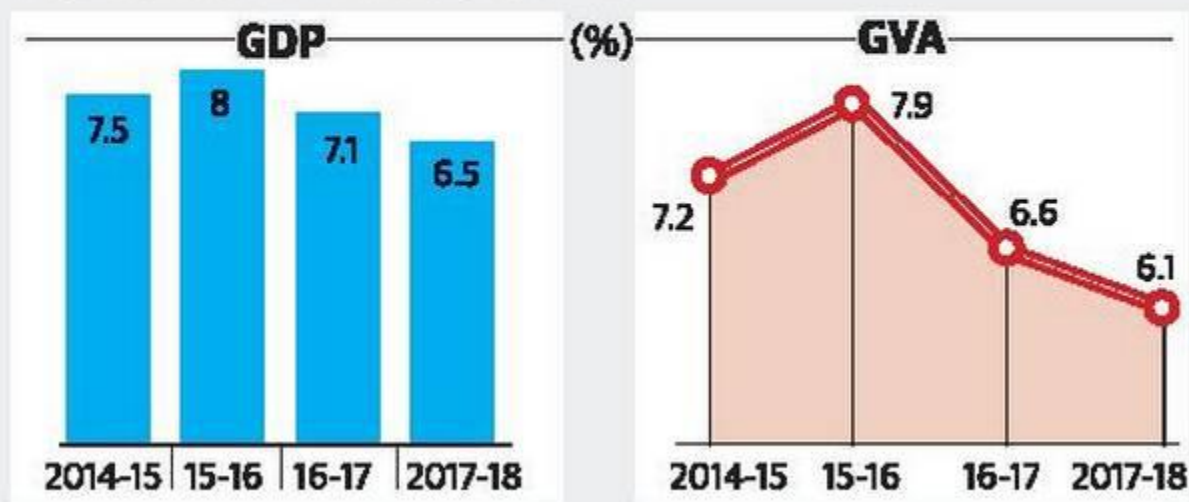
Part of: GS Paper III- Indian economy

Key pointers:

- The Central Statistics Office (CSO) on recently forecast that GDP growth in the current financial year ending March 31 will slow to a four-year low of 6.5% dragged down by deceleration in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors.
- In agriculture, it will be because of a base effect because last year saw a very high growth rate because it followed two years of drought.

Growth decelerates

As per CSO estimates, GDP growth rate was seen at a four-year low of 6.5% in 2017-18



Source: CSO's first advance estimates for 2017-18 & MOSPI

Pic

credit:

http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/article22378941.ece/alternates/FREE_615/TH06new%20Page%201%20GDPcol

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/gdp-growth-seen-slowing-to-4-year-low-of-6.5-in-2017-18/article22378942.ece>

Labelling on the package of organic food made mandatory

Part of: GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- It will be illegal to sell organic food that was not appropriately labelled so from July 2018.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) had issued regulations that required food companies selling organic produce to get certified with one of the two authorities — National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) or the Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India).
- Labelling on the package of organic food shall convey full and accurate information on the organic status of the product.
- For nearly two decades now, organic farming certification had been done through a process of third party certification under the NPOP. It was run by the Ministry of Commerce and was used for certifying general exports.
- The PGS-India programme, in contrast, had been around for only two years and — unlike the top-down approach of the NPOP — involves a peer-review approach. Here, farmers played a role in certifying whether the farms in their vicinity adhered to organic-cultivation practices.

Grow healthy, eat healthy

A look at the status of organic farming, which is catching up in India

1.5 mh
of cultivable land certified under National Programme for Organic Production in 2015-16


1.35 mt
tonnes certified organic products are produced in India. A fifth of the total produce was exported



- 5,85,200 farmers were engaged in organic farming in 2015, more than any other country and a quarter of the world
- Only 1.7% of India's cultivated area is under organic farming

What is an organic product?
Fruits, vegetables, fibre and animal products sourced or grown in an environment free of chemical pesticide, fertilizers, genetically-modified organisms and induced hormones

How can you identify an organic product?
There are special logos on packaging of foods that are used to identify foods as organic. The FSSAI had recently introduced 'Jivik Bharat' logo



mh: Million hectare, mt: Million tonne

Pic

credit:

http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article22378458.ece/alternates/FREE_660/TH06Organic%20foodcol

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/label-mandatory-for-food-certified-as-organic-from-july/article22378459.ece>

Social security code for informal labour

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Inclusive growth

Key pointers:

- The central government is readying the blueprint for a social security scheme that is specifically aimed as a safety net for workers in the informal labour sector.
- The draft social security code, drafted by the Ministry of Labour & Employment, aims for universal coverage that includes those who are outside the ambit of the EPFO and the ESIC.
- The scheme envisages mandatory pension, insurance against disability and death, and maternity coverage, alongside optional medical and unemployment coverage.

Background:

- According to the survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in 2011-12, about 83 per cent or 39.14 crore persons out of total 47.41 crore employed persons were employed in unorganised sector.
- The organised sector is already covered through social security legislations like the Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 and the Employees State Insurance Act, 1948, while the labour law coverage for unorganised sector is lacking in the country.

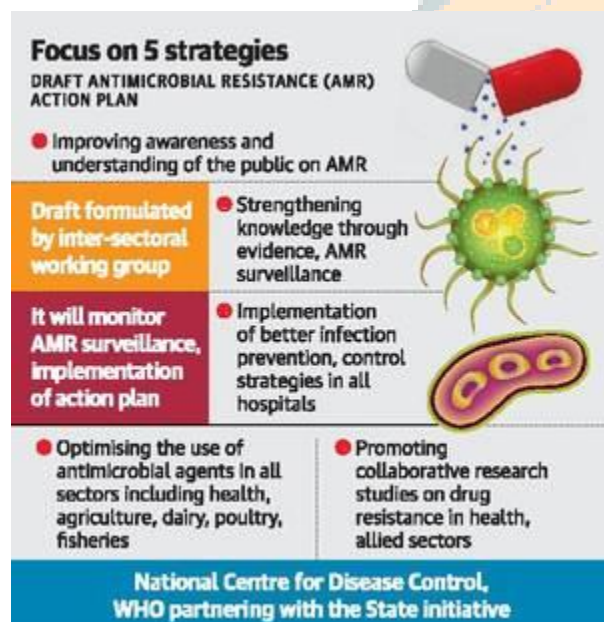
Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/social-security-scheme-draft-labour-modi-govt-epfo-5015555/>

Kerala's plan for tackling AMR

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues related to health

Key pointers:

- With antimicrobial resistance (AMR) emerging as a major concern in the health as well as allied sectors such as veterinary, dairy, fisheries and poultry, Kerala is all set to launch its strategic action plan for tackling AMR.
- The State intends to set up an AMR surveillance network to have a clear understanding of the drug-resistant pathogens in the community, reducing the irrational consumption of antibiotics, and ensuring that rational antibiotic prescription policies are followed by medical fraternity.
- The government is coordinating with stakeholders in agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, poultry, dairy sectors also
- The draft AMR action focusses on five strategies-



Pic

credit:

http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/article22388176.ece/alternates/FREE_300/07tv%20AMRcol

The concept of One Health:

Kerala will be dealing with the AMR situation from the 'One Health' platform. **One Health** is a fairly recent global concept that the health of humans is linked to the health of animals and environment).

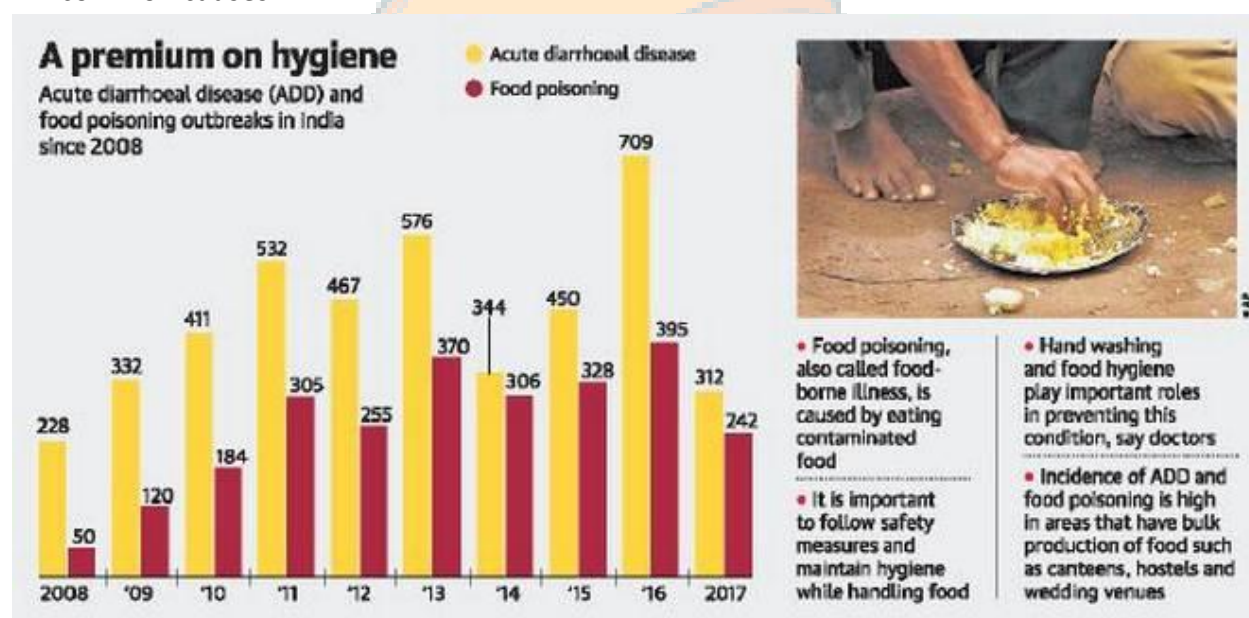
Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/kerala-battles-a-new-health-risk/article22388177.ece>

[Food poisoning: A common outbreak in India](#)

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues related to health

Key pointers:

- A data by the Union Health Ministry's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) has indicated that food poisoning is one of the commonest outbreaks reported in 2017. This is apart from acute diarrhoeal disease (ADD).
- Acute diarrhoeal disease and food poisoning have been common outbreaks since 2008. This is followed by chickenpox and measles.
- Food poisoning, also called food-borne illness, is caused by eating contaminated food. Infectious organisms including bacteria, viruses and parasites or their toxins are the most common causes.



Pic

credit:

http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article22392233.ece/alternates/FREE_660/TH08Food%20poisoningcol

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/food-poisoning-a-common-outbreak-in-2017/article22392234.ece>

SC to revisit Section 377, IPC

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions in various sectors

Key pointers:

- The Supreme Court has decided to revisit its December 2013 order upholding the constitutional validity of Indian Penal Code section 377 which criminalises same-sex relations between consenting adults.
- The SC bench noted that “a section of people or individuals who exercise their choice should never remain in a state of fear” and “societal morality also changes from age to age”.
- “What is natural may not be natural to the other. But the said natural and sexual orientation and choice cannot be allowed to cross boundaries of law but confines of law cannot trample or curtail the inherent right embedded in an individual under Article 21 of Constitution,” the judges said.

Background:

- In December 2013, ruling on **Suresh Kumar Koushal and another vs NAZ Foundation and Others**, the SC bench upheld the validity of the British-era provision, upsetting a 2009 verdict of the Delhi High Court which held IPC section 377 in so far as it criminalises consensual sexual acts of adults in private as violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/section-377-supreme-court-to-revisit-judgment-refers-matter-to-larger-bench-5016066/>

BharatNet Project: Progress

Part of: Mains GS Paper III-

Key pointers:

- The government has completed the first phase of BharatNet project to provide broadband connectivity to 1 lakh gram panchayats.
- The Centre is expecting to preempt its original target of March 2019 for the second phase by concluding it ahead of schedule by December this year.
- The second phase of the project has been initiated for connecting the remaining 1.5 lakh gram panchayats.

BharatNet project:

- The objective of the government’s flagship project is to provide affordable broadband services in rural and remote areas, in partnership with states and the private sector.
- The project will generate massive employment opportunities, both direct and indirect, in the country in the coming days.

- The infrastructure is expected to catalyse digital delivery of services for the rural poor in crucial areas like health, education, livelihood, skills, e-agriculture and e-commerce.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/business/business-others/bharatnet-project-centre-may-achieve-early-completion-of-2nd-phase-5016823/>

Traffic safety management system (TSMS)

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- Cameras with their superior eyes will be installed on the roads to catch hold of speed junkies and those who jump signals.
- It will go live on a 14-km stretch in the national Capital.
- Maruti Suzuki will spend Rs. 15 crore on the system and will implement it with Delhi Police.
- While the carmaker will set up the system and maintain it for two years, its operation will be the preserve of Delhi Police.
- The project hopes to reduce accidents and fatalities, improve compliance of traffic rules, bring in transparency in enforcing the eChallan system, create awareness on commuter safety and surveillance of traffic movement.

Background:

- Last year, around 1,495 people lost their lives to road accidents in Delhi, among the highest in the country.
- The TSMS project, the first of its kind in the Capital, is in line with the Centre's focus on making roads safe and bringing down accidents and fatalities.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/delhis-police-will-soon-get-marutis-eyes/article10022740.ece>

India's supercomputer Pratyush

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:

- India unveiled Pratyush, an array of computers that can deliver a peak power of 6.8 petaflops.

- Pratyush is the fourth fastest supercomputer in the world dedicated for weather and climate research, and follows machines in Japan, USA and the United Kingdom. It will also move an Indian supercomputer from the 300s to the 30s in the Top500 list.
- A key function of the machine's computing power would be monsoon forecasting using a dynamical model. This requires simulating the weather for a given month — say March — and letting a custom-built model calculate how the actual weather will play out over June, July, August and September.
- With the new system, it would be possible to map regions in India at a resolution of 3 km and the globe at 12 km.

Top five fastest supercomputers of the world

Rank	Site	Rpeak (TFlop/s)	Power (kW)
1	National Supercomputing Center in Wuxi, China	1,25,435.9	15,371
2	National Super Computer Centre in Guangzhou, China	54,902.4	17,808
3	Swiss National Supercomputing Centre, Switzerland	25,326.3	2,272
4	Japan Agency for Marine Earth Science and Technology, Japan	28,192	1,350
5	DOE/SC/Oak Ridge National Laboratory, United States	27,112.5	8,209



Rpeak values are based on clock rate of CPU

Source: Top500.org

Pic

credit:

http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article22399105.ece/alternates/FREE_615/TH09Cybercol

Background:

- One petaflop is a million billion floating point operations per second and is a reflection of the computing capacity of a system.
- The Top500 list is a respected international tracker of the world's fastest supercomputers.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-unveils-pratyush-its-fastest-supercomputer-yet/article22398732.ece>

["Drone" cameras to be used by Indian Railways](#)

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- Indian Railways has decided to deploy "Drone" cameras (UAV/NETRA) for various railway activities especially project monitoring and maintenance of tracks and other railway infrastructure.
- This is in-line with Railways' desire to use technology to enhance safety and efficiency in train operations.
- "Drone" cameras shall be deployed to undertake monitoring activities of relief and rescue operation, project monitoring, the progress of important works, conditions of the track and inspection related activities.
- It shall also be used to assess preparedness of Non-Interlocking (NI) works, crowd management during fairs and melas, to identify scrap and also for an aerial survey of station yards.
- It is going to be instrumental in providing real-time inputs related to safety and maintenance of tracks and other railway infrastructure.
- Under this initiative, West Central Railways with headquarter at Jabalpur (M.P) has become the first Zonal Railway to procure "Drone" cameras in Indian Railways.

Article link: <https://www.oneindia.com/india/indian-railways-to-deploy-drone-cameras-to-enhance-safety-in-train-operations-2615829.html>

Modifications in FDI rules

Part of: GS Mains Paper III- Indian Economy

Key pointers:

- The Union Cabinet modified foreign investment rules Wednesday to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in single-brand retail and real estate broking services through the automatic route.
- Investment up to 49 per cent under approval mechanism was allowed in Air India to facilitate its divestment process and Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) and Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) have been permitted to invest in power exchanges through the primary market.
- The measures, the government said, are intended to "liberalise and simplify the FDI policy so as to provide ease of doing business in the country".
- In case of single-brand retail, while the current FDI policy allows 49 per cent FDI under the automatic route and FDI beyond 49 per cent and up to 100 per cent through the government approval route, the revised policy allows 100 per cent FDI under the automatic route.

- Foreign airlines can now invest up to 49 per cent under approval route in Air India subject to the conditions that the foreign investment in Air India shall not exceed 49 per cent either directly or indirectly.
- The government also liberalised FDI regime for medical devices.



WHAT HAS CHANGED

- 100% FDI under automatic route for single-brand retail. Currently, govt nod needed for 49- 100% FDI.
- 100% FDI under automatic route for real-estate broking. Earlier, brokerage services clubbed with real estate.
- Foreign airlines allowed to invest up to 49% under approval route in Air India.
- FPIs/FPIs allowed to invest in power exchanges through primary market. Earlier, only via secondary market.
- Definition of 'medical devices' amended in FDI policy, delinks medical devices from pharmaceutical sector.

Pic credit: <http://images.indianexpress.com/2018/01/fdu.jpg>

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/ease-of-doing-business-govt-approves-100-fdi-retail-air-india-power-exchange-5018884/>

Sub-national Logistics Performance Index (LPI)

Part of: GS Mains Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- Logistics Performance Index (LPI) ranks states in terms of the logistical support they provide to promote trade.
- Prepared by the commerce ministry
- It will be a perception-based ranking and it is the first time in the world that it is coming at the sub-national level.
- The index will act as a dynamic toll for the ministry to identify bottlenecks in this area.
- The ranking is based on about eight parameters such as transportation facilities available in states and documentation procedures.

- The ranking aims at encouraging states to work and improving upon their logistics related infrastructure. Inadequate infrastructure is impacting the country's trade and investments.
- In this year's rankings- Gujarat has topped a perception-based index of mobility of goods and efficiency of logistics chain, closely followed by Punjab and Andhra Pradesh.

World Bank's report:

In the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI), India's ranking improved to 35th as against 54th spot it occupied in the previous report. The report came in 2016 as it comes once-in-two-years.

Article link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/logistics-performance-ranking-of-states-to-be-released-tmrw/articleshow/62400272.cms>

Caste and gender distribution in teaching profession

Part of: Mains GS Paper I, II- Social issues, Issues related to education

Key pointers:

- The recently released All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) for the year 2016-17 reveals that- At 4.9%, Muslim representation among teachers in higher educational institutions in India is much lower than the community's proportion in India's population (14.2%).
- The representation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is also lower than the populations of the two categories. The representation of SCs is at 8.3% of the total number of teachers in higher educational institutions, ST representation is 2.2%. The Scheduled Castes account for 16.6% of India's population and STs about 8.6%.

Gender distribution in the teaching profession at the higher education level:

- Bihar comes across as having a hugely skewed gender ratio, with 75.3% male teachers and just 24.7% female teachers. Jharkhand also shows an excess of male teachers, with the ratio at 60:40.
- A few states Kerala, Punjab, Chandigarh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Delhi and Goa have more female teachers than male teachers.

Reason

One reason for the skew in representation may be variable access to higher education – a must for teaching at these levels.

behind:

The data reveal that SC, ST and OBC reservations have still not brought about representational parity.

All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) is done by the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/only-49-of-higher-education-teachers-muslims/article22431446.ece>

Wealth Index prepared by NFHS-4

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Background:

- The National Family and Health Survey (NFHS-4) was conducted among more than 6 lakh households in 2015-16.
- Its large sample size and the fact that it was carried out just a couple of years ago, makes it an extremely useful source of information in analysing India's socio-economic landscape.
- NFHS-4 has prepared a wealth index.

Wealth index:

- The index has been prepared on the basis of scores on ownership of consumer goods such as television and bicycles, and household characteristics such as availability of clean drinking water.
- This information has been used to classify all households into wealth quintiles. Those in the lowest quintile would be the poorest 20%, while those in the top would be the richest 20% of the lot.
- The report then uses these quintile scores to classify population for states, religious and caste groups and rural-urban areas into each quintile.

Findings:

- The report shows that poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon in India. 29% of rural India belongs to the bottom quintile, while the figure is just 3.3% for urban India.
- Among major states, people in Delhi and Punjab are the richest with more than 60% of their households in the top wealth quintile.
- Bihar is the poorest with more than half of the households in the bottom wealth quintile.
- Jains are the richest religious community, with more than 70% of their population in the top quintile.

- There isn't much difference between Hindus and Muslims and they are very close to the national distribution of wealth.
- Upper castes have almost double the share of households in the top quintile compared to any other caste group.
- Scheduled Tribes are the worst-off section in terms of wealth.

NFHS-4 statistics on disparity in wealth-holdings across various categories tell us that there cannot be a one size fits all policy if the government is serious about addressing this problem.

Article link: http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/delhi-and-punjab-richest-states-jain-wealthiest-community-national-survey/story-sakdd3MBOOfKhU2p5LrNVUM.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

China ends India's monopoly in providing internet access to Nepal

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- China recently became Nepal's second internet service provider, breaking India's monopoly in providing internet access to the Himalayan Kingdom.
- So far, Nepal had been linked to the global internet network through Indian telecom operators, using optical fiber connections in Biratnagar, Bhairahawa and Birgunj, among others.
- A new terrestrial fiber cable will now connect Nepal and China through the Jilong (Rasuwadahi) border gateway.
- The Chinese side views its Nepal venture as part of a larger digital network of countries along the New Silk Road.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-breaks-indias-internet-monopoly-in-nepal/article22428763.ece>

Face Authentication for Aadhaar users

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions in various sectors

Key pointers:

- The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) recently announced the addition of facial recognition-based authentication for Aadhaar users, especially those who have problems with other forms of biometric verification such as fingerprint or iris.
- It will be launched by July 1 this year.
- It will help all elderly or other facing issues with fingerprint authentication.
- UIDAI provides the fingerprint and iris biometric authentication at select Authentication User Agencies (AUAs), similarly Face Authentication shall also be allowed on need basis.
- The UIDAI's latest feature comes after the agency last week announced a two-layer security mechanism to protect the privacy of users (Virtual IDs).

Article link: http://www.hindustantimes.com/tech/uidai-launches-face-authentication-for-aadhaar-users/story-NMYjRI1kH2buHq9hMnw7MM.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

Huge loss of agricultural produce due to weeds

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indian agriculture

Key pointers:

- India loses agricultural produce worth over \$11 billion — more than the Centre's budgetary allocation for agriculture for 2017-18 — annually to weeds, according to a study by researchers associated with the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- The actual economic losses due to weeds were found to be highest in rice, followed by wheat and soybean. However, the average yield loss is the lowest in rice — 14 per cent in transplanted rice and 21 per cent in direct-seeded condition.
- The researchers, from the Jabalpur-based Directorate of Weed Research (DWR), estimated the economic losses using data generated by an all India co-ordinated research project on weed management.
- To calculate the actual yield loss, the scientists multiplied the difference in yield in weed-free situations and crop yield reported by farmers with minimum support price in respective States.
- Studies some years ago showed that globally, weeds are responsible for decreasing production of the eight most important food and cash crops by 13.6 per cent, leading to an economic loss of \$100 billion.

Economic losses due to weeds in 10 major crops	
	in \$ million
Rice	4,420
Wheat	3,376
Soybean	1,559
Maize	739
Groundnut	283
Sorghum	276
Greengram	161
Mustard	72
Sesame	50
Pearlmillet	17



Pic

credit:

http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/multimedia/dynamic/03221/BL16_ndtvj_weed_GS_322_1407e.jpg

Proper weed management could bring down these losses substantially. Judicious use of herbicides can cost farmers just one-third of what they spend on manual weeding.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/india-loses-farm-produce-worth-11b-to-weeds-every-year-icar/article10033605.ece>

INTACH to document heritage sites along Mahanadi R.

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Indian Culture

Key pointers:

- Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) launched a programme for documentation of the tangible and intangible heritage sites along both sides of Mahanadi river, sources in it said today.
- Seven teams of culture enthusiasts will cover nearly 1000 kilometres on both side of the river Mahanadi under the project.
- The tangible and intangible heritage along the river will be documented and the important heritage structures will be photographed and video-graphed. It will be a road map for the conservation workers, historians, students and researchers.

Article link: <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/intach-to-document-heritage-sites-along-mahanadi-river/1230706>

ASER 2017 Report

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues related to education

Key pointers:

- The latest Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), carried out by NGO Pratham finds that while 86% of youth in the 14-18 age group are still in the formal education system (school or college) and 73% students had used a mobile phone within the last week, more than half of them (57%) struggle to do simple Class 2-level division.
- Unlike earlier surveys, which measured learning levels in the 5-to-16 age group, **ASER 2017 focused on 14- to 18-year-olds** — those who have moved just beyond elementary school age and are on the threshold of adulthood.
- The study attempts look at skills beyond foundational reading and arithmetic and focusing on **four As** — activity (what they are doing), ability (level of basic skills), awareness (their access to media, traditional and new) and aspirations.
- It finds that while the youth are high on aspiration (about 60% wanted to study beyond Class 12), they are short on vital, everyday skills that are needed to help them get to where they aspire.
- About 25 per cent of those in this age group couldn't read basic text fluently and 57% struggled when asked to divide a 3-digit number by a single digit.

Gender gap:

- The survey also finds a glaring gender divide with boys outperforming girls in almost every task assigned to them, such as counting money and adding weights, and on many other parameters such as access to digital media.
- Girls and young women had far lower access to computers and the Internet when compared to boys.
- While in normal ASERs (previous reports that surveyed 5- to 16-year-olds, there wasn't much difference in reading levels and math between boys and girls, here (14-18 yrs) in almost every task assigned to them, there is a gender difference. What it probably tells is that some of these daily tasks, such as calculating money, involve an exposure to a world outside their homes which these girls don't have access to.

Mains focus:

- Academic skills don't seem to get transferred to life skills or everyday skills. It's time to connect the dots. It probably involves a relook at the curriculum.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/education/aser-report-2017-more-rural-teens-staying-back-in-school-but-struggle-with-reading-math-girls-worse-off-5027876/>

[Attack on couple going for Inter-caste marriages Illegal: SC](#)

Part of: GS Mains Paper I- Social Issues**Key pointers:**

- Supreme Court- "Any attack against an adult man and woman opting for an inter-caste marriage by khap panchayats or associations is "absolutely illegal".
- The bench asked the Centre to respond on suggestions given by amicus curiae (friend of the court) Raju Ramachandran on ways to prevent harassment and killing of young couples in the name of family honour for marrying out of their caste or in the same clan (gotra).
- The top court added that if the Centre does not do anything to ban such panchayats then it would have to step in.
- Khaps, caste or community organisations representing a clan or a group of related clans, frequently make pronouncements on social issues and have often landed in controversies owing to their diktats.

Article link: http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/khap-panchayats-ruling-against-inter-caste-marriage-of-adults-absolutely-illegal-sc/story-w1bVf2yfgpscWYzaDOrfP.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

[India considering becoming member of Budapest convention](#)**Part of:** Mains GS Paper II- Internal security**Key pointers:**

- India is reconsidering its position on becoming a member of the Budapest Convention because of the surge in cyber crime, especially after a push for digital India.
- The move, however, is being opposed by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) on the grounds that sharing data with foreign law enforcement agencies infringes on national sovereignty and may jeopardise the rights of individuals.
- A deadline of February this year has been set to operationalise the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C). The Home Minister had announced the setting up of I4C in 2016 to deal with all types of cyber crime at the national level.
- "I4C will be set up under the newly created Cyber and Information Security (CIS) division of the MHA. CIS will have four wings, namely security clearance, cybercrime prevention, cyber security and information security".

The Budapest Convention:

- It provides for the criminalisation of conduct, ranging from illegal access, data and systems interference to computer-related fraud and child pornography, procedural law tools to make investigation of cybercrime and securing of e-evidence in relation to any crime more effective, and international police and judicial cooperation on cybercrime and e-evidence.
- The Convention has 56 members, including the US and the UK.

There is a need for international cooperation to check cybercrime, radicalisation and boost data security.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/home-ministry-pitches-for-budapest-convention-on-cyber-security-rajnath-singh-5029314/>

EWDS (Early Warning Dissemination System)

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Disaster and disaster management.

Key pointers:

- Odisha will become the first Indian state to have an early warning system in place for natural disasters.
- Odisha is the first State in India to have developed an automatic public address system that can be activated along its entire coast.
- Early warning Dissemination System project aims to establish a fool-proof communication system to address the existing gaps in disseminating disaster warning up to the community level.
- The EWDS comprises of technologies like Satellite-Based Mobile Data Voice Terminals (SBMDVT), Digital Mobile Radio (DMR), Mass Messaging System (MMS) and Universal Communication Interface (UCI) for inter-operability among different communication technologies.
- Disaster warnings would be issued through sirens that will go off simultaneously from 122 towers in six coastal districts.
- It is being implemented with assistance from the world Bank's national cyclone risk mitigation project.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/odisha-to-have-first-automatic-coastal-warning-for-disasters-in-india/article18700613.ece>

Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS)

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

Key pointers:

- GATS is a nationally representative household survey of adults 15 years of age or older that is intended to enhance the capacity of countries to design, implement and evaluate tobacco control interventions.
- GATS 2016-17 was conducted by the Union health ministry with technical assistance from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), US.
- Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2016-17, India has witnessed an overall decline in the number of tobacco users in past seven years, especially among the age group of 15 to 24.



GLOBAL ADULT TOBACCO SURVEY

AGE & TOBACCO

AGE GROUP	SMOKING	SMOKELESS TOBACCO USE
15-24	12	0.8
24-44	5.9	23.2
45-64	14.8	20
>65	16.9	17.5

Figures in percentage

PASSIVE SMOKING DIPS (Second hand smoke or passive smoking)

At public places

19.9%

(-12%)

At homes

37.9%

(-20%)

At workplace

20.9%

(-12%)

GETTING COSTLIER

29% jump (from Rs 587.2 to 755.6) in average monthly expenditure on cigarettes for a daily smoker

136% jump (from Rs 189.8 to 447.7) in average monthly expenditure on *bidi* for a daily smoker

Pic link: <http://images.indianexpress.com/2018/01/survey1.jpg>

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/despite-ban-no-dip-in-gutkha-consumption-in-gujarat-survey-5030873/>

Report highlights India's digital divide

Part of: GS Paper II – National; India and Bharat; Urban-Rural divide

Key pointers:

- Report name: Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report, 2017
- Report focused on rural youth in the 14-18 age group
- Kerala - far ahead of all Indian States in breaching the digital divide (very low percentage of the surveyed rural youth had never used the Internet and mobile phone)
- West Bengal seems right at the bottom in terms of the rural youth's access to the Internet, computers and mobiles (high percentage of rural youth had never used the Internet and mobile phone)

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/report-highlights-indias-digital-divide/article22468162.ece>


Agni-V successfully tested for 5th time

Part of: GS paper III: Defence and Security

India successfully tested Agni-V

About Agni V:

- intercontinental ballistic missile developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)
- long range surface-to-surface ballistic missile
- part of Integrated Guided Missile Development Program
- range of over 5,000 km; can reach most parts of China



FIRE POWER

The Agni-V is the most advanced version of the indigenously-built missile series

- It is an Intercontinental surface-to-surface nuclear-capable ballistic missile
- Developed by DRDO

Propulsion	Length	Weight	Payload	Engine
3 stages	17.5 metres	50 tonnes	1 tonne	3 stage solid

- Agni-V was last tested on December 26, 2016
- Countries with ICBM technology: U.S., Russia, U.K., France and China

Other missiles in the series

	Agni-1	Agni-2	Agni-3	Agni-4	Agni-5
Range (km)	700	2,000	3,000	4,000	5,000+
Test date	April 19, 2012	Sept. 15, 2013	Jan. 31, 2015	Nov. 9, 2015	Jan. 18, 2018

RANGE
More than
5,000
kilometres

Pic link: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/article22467759.ece/alternates/FREE_660/th18-Dinakar-LoG0A38SJF81jpgjpg

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/agni-v-extends-its-reach/article22467760.ece>

Pact to protect health of planet

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Key pointers:

- UN Environment and the World Health Organisation have agreed on a new, wide-ranging collaboration to accelerate action to curb environmental health risks that cause an estimated 12.6 million deaths a year.
- UN Environment and WHO has signed the agreement to step up joint actions to combat air pollution, climate change and antimicrobial resistance, as well as improve coordination on waste and chemicals management, water quality, and food and nutrition issues.
- The collaboration also includes joint management of the **BreatheLife advocacy campaign** to reduce air pollution for climate, environment and health benefits.
- This represents the most significant formal agreement on joint action across the spectrum of environment and health issues in over 15 years.
- There is an urgent need for the two agencies to work more closely together to address the critical threats to environmental sustainability and climate — which are the foundations for life on this planet.

This new agreement recognises this reality.

- Our health is directly related to the health of the environment we live in. Together, air, water and chemical hazards kill more than 12.6 million people a year.
- Most of these deaths occur in developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America where environmental pollution takes its biggest health toll.
- The new collaboration creates a systematic framework for joint research, development of tools and guidance, capacity building, monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals, global and regional partnerships.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/pact-to-protect-the-health-of-planet/article10042590.ece>

Smart City Mission: 99 cities

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- Nine more cities, including Silvassa, Erode, Moradabad and Itanagar, will now be part of Smart Cities Mission, increasing the total number of such cities to 99.
- With 99 cities now part of the Smart Cities Mission(SCM), the total proposed investment in these cities is estimated to be Rs. 2,03,979 crore.
- The newly announced cities will have approximately 409 projects. The funding sources for these projects is proposed to include contribution from State and Centre, convergence, PPP, the SCM's own sources and other sources.

Liveability index

- To make cities more 'liveable', Puri also announced the commencement of the Liveability Index Programme in 116 cities.
- The programme seeks to develop a common minimum framework for cities to assess their existing status and chart their path towards better quality of life.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/9-more-cities-come-under-smart-cities-plan/article10042609.ece>

Office of Profit: Explained

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Key pointers:**What are the basic criteria to disqualify an MP or MLA?**

Basic disqualification criteria for an MP are laid down in **Article 102** of the Constitution, and for an MLA in **Article 191**.

They can be disqualified for:

- a) Holding an office of profit under government of India or state government;
- b) Being of unsound mind;
- c) Being an undischarged insolvent;
- d) Not being an Indian citizen or for acquiring citizenship of another country

What is 'office of profit'?

The word 'office' has **not been defined in the Constitution** or the Representation of the People Act of 1951.

But different courts have interpreted it to mean a position with certain duties that are more or less of public character.

How do courts or EC decide whether an MP or MLA has profited from an office?

The Supreme Court, while upholding the disqualification of Jaya Bachchan from Rajya Sabha in 2006, had said, "For deciding the question as to whether one is holding an office of profit or not, what is relevant is whether the **office is capable of yielding a profit or pecuniary gain** and not whether the person actually obtained a monetary gain... If the office carries with it, or entitles the holder to, any pecuniary gain other than reimbursement of out of pocket/actual expenses, then the office will be an office of profit for the purpose of Article 102 (1)(a)..." However, a person who acquires a contract or licence from a government to perform functions, which the government would have itself discharged, will not be held guilty of holding an office of profit.

What is the underlying principle for including 'office of profit' as criterion for disqualification?

Makers of the Constitution wanted that legislators should not feel obligated to the Executive in any way, which could influence them while discharging legislative functions. In other words, an MP or MLA should be free to carry out her duties without any kind of governmental pressure.

Recent instances:

In March 2006, President APJ Abdul Kalam disqualified Jaya Bachchan of the SP from Rajya Sabha with retrospective effect from July 14, 2004, for holding an office of profit as chairperson of the UP Film Development Council.

In January 2015, UP MLAs Bajrang Bahadur Singh (BJP) and Uma Shankar Singh (BSP) were disqualified from the assembly after they were indicted by the Lokayukta for bagging government construction contracts by misusing their position.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/what-is/office-of-profit-what-the-why-5032038/>

US soon to become world's second largest producer of oil

Part of: GS Paper II- Internal developments

Key pointers:

- The International Energy Agency (IEA) expects the United States oil output to be higher than that of Saudi Arabia in 2018.
- This would make US the world's second largest producer after Russia.
- In its monthly oil market report, the IEA said that 2018 would become a "record-setting" year for American shale oil producers.
- A group of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) and non-OPEC oil producers have maintained their output cuts in wake of price fall.
- OPEC member states agreed to lower production in 2017 and have decided to maintain their output cuts for the whole of 2018 to shore up crude prices and reduce a global supply glut.

Article link: http://www.dw.com/en/us-set-to-overtake-saudi-oil-output-this-year/a-42218120?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

Star rating of Garbage-free cities

Part of: GS Paper II- Urbansiation

Key pointers:

- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) Hardeep Singh Puri has launched the 'Protocol for Star Rating of Garbage-Free Cities'.
- The star-rating initiative, developed by the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban, will be rating cities on a seven-star rating system based on multiple cleanliness indicators for solid waste management, which will include- Door to Door Collection, bulk generator compliance, source segregation, sweeping, scientific processing of waste, scientific land filling, plastic waste management, construction and demolition management, dump remediation& citizen grievance redressal system etc.

- Cities can be rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 star based on their compliance with the protocol conditions specified for each of the rating.
- Further city should be ODF (Open Defecation Free) before it could be given rating of 3 star or above.
- While cities may self-declare themselves as 1-star, 2-star or 4-star, MoHUA will carry out an additional verification through an independent third party to certify cities as 3-star, 5-star or 7-star.
- Cities will need to get re-certified themselves every year to retain their star-status.

Article link: <http://www.uniindia.com/swachh-bharat-mission-urban-launches-smart-star-rating-for-garbage-free-cities/states/news/1112075.html>

2018 to be declared as the 'national year of millets'

Part of: GS Paper III- Indian agriculture

Key pointers:

- The Union government has decided to declare 2018 as the 'national year of millets'.
- Dedicating a year for millets will- Increase awareness about its health benefits. Result in higher demand for these drought-resistant varieties, resulting in remunerative prices for poor and marginal farmers.
- There is a need to promote millet cultivation 'as we move towards climate-smart agriculture in the wake of frequent droughts'.
- Karnataka is the country's leader in the millet sector.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/centre-to-declare-2018-as-national-year-of-millets/article22478125.ece>

A mission-mode approach to promote millets

Part of: GS Paper II- Government interventions in various sectors

Key pointers:

- In the National Year of Millets, the Centre proposes to adopt a mission-mode approach to promote the nutrient-rich cereals, including sorghum, ragi and foxtail millets.

- A Millet Mission is being proposed with an outlay of Rs. 800 crore for the next two years to boost production of these cereals.
- The proposed mission, apart from aiming to boost supplies of these nutri-cereals, is expected to help address the issue of nutrition security.
- Besides supporting farmers with technical inputs, including seeds, the mission will focus on farm-gate processing, aggregation, and provide linkages to the value addition industry and markets.
- Also, seed hubs are being planned in major millet growing States and a referral lab is being set up at the Hyderabad-based Indian Institute of Millets Research to give a fresh impetus to R&D activities. On the demand side, the proposed mission will focus on creating consumer awareness.

Central focus:

- India, which grows over half-a-dozen varieties of millets, produces around 20 million tonnes of these nutri-cereals, which make up about 7 per cent of the country's overall foodgrain output of around 275 mt.
- It will be implemented in at least 16 of the 21 States that grow millets.
- Millets are naturally rich with protein and nutrients such as iron, calcium and zinc, and also consume less water and inputs, thus being ecologically sustainable.
- The NITI Aayog has recommended including millets in the public distribution system.

Akshaya Patra the mid-day meal implementing agency in Karnataka, has recently launched a pilot with a millet-based diet in Bengaluru and has started distributing a millet-based snack to schoolchildren in Telangana.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/millet-mission-to-promote-nutrient-rich-cereals-rs-800crore-outlay-on-the-cards/article10046723.ece>

[India to be world's fastest-growing economy in 2018 and 2019: IMF](#)

Part of: GS Paper III- Indian Economy

Key pointers:

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has retained India's GDP forecast for the country at 6.7 per cent in 2017 and 7.4 per cent in 2018.
- In its World Economic Outlook Update, it also estimated that the Indian economy would grow by 7.8 per cent in 2019, which make the country the world's fastest-growing economy in 2018 and 2019, the top ranking it briefly lost in 2017 to China.

- The projection is in line with official estimates from the Central Statistics Office, which pegged GDP growth at 6.5 per cent this fiscal.
- The IMF has scaled up its forecast for world output to 3.9 per cent each in 2018 and 2019.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/imf-sees-india-as-fastestgrowing-economy-in-2018-2019/article10046720.ece>

Inclusive Development Index: World Economic Forum

Part of: GS Paper III- Indian Growth & Economy

Key pointers:

- Despite an improved performance, India continues to be ranked below neighbours Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal in the Inclusive Development Index released by the World Economic Forum.
- India has been ranked 62 out of 74 emerging economies on a metric focussed on the living standards of people and future-proofing of economies by the WEF.
- Pakistan has been ranked 47, Sri Lanka is at 40, and Nepal at 22; Uganda (59) and Mali (60) are also higher on the index than India.
- India, the WEF said, reflects an 'improving trend'. There has been a 2.29 per cent improvement in the overall five-year trend of the IDI for India.
- Though the incidence of poverty has declined in India over the past five years, six out of 10 Indians still live on less than \$3.20 per day.
- According to the study, Norway tops the chart followed by Iceland and Luxemburg in advanced economies. Lithuania, Hungary, and Azerbaijan are the toppers among the emerging economies.
- Designed as an alternative to GDP, the Inclusive Development Index (IDI) reflects more closely the criteria by which people evaluate their countries' economic progress.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/but-on-inclusive-growth-still-lags-behind-sri-lanka-pakistan/article10046722.ece>

PM Modi in Davos

Part of: GS Mains Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi used his keynote speech at **the Plenary Session of the World Economic Forum in Davos** to showcase the role that India is set to play in the global economy.
- Speaking in Hindi, Modi made a forceful impact on the global power elite as he addressed three major challenges that mankind faces: Climate Change, Terrorism and Protectionism.
- Highlighting India's growing influence in the global economy, Modi recalled that in 1997, when an Indian Prime Minister last attended the WEF, the country's GDP was a bit over \$400 billion. "Two decades later, the country's GDP has multiplied over six times," he said.
- He raised the issue of the protectionist approach of major economies, which, he said, hurts the essence of globalisation.
- On climate change, Modi said there is a dearth of countries willing to assist in helping fellow nations tackle climate change. Everyone wants to cut carbon emissions, but very few countries are coming forward to share technologies with developing countries.
- PM Modi also expressed concern over the changing nature of terrorism. More than terrorism, the bigger concern is the artificial divide created between good and bad terrorism. The more pressing and immediate issue that calls for our attention is the radicalisation of well-to-do and educated youth.

About WEF:

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) is a Swiss nonprofit foundation, based in Switzerland. Its mission is cited as "committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas".
- The Forum holds its annual meeting at the end of January in **Davos**, in the eastern Alps region of Switzerland.
- The meeting brings together some 2,500 top business leaders, international political leaders, economists, and journalists for up to four days to discuss the most pressing issues facing the world.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/modi-puts-india-power-on-show-at-davos-meet/article10048609.ece>

[Jobless in India, to rise: ILO](#)

Part of: GS Mains Paper III- Inclusive growth

Key pointers:

- The number of jobless persons in India is likely to increase over the next two years with no change in the unemployment rate, the ILO has estimated.
- The Asia-Pacific region will add 23 million jobs from 2017 to 2019, with employment generation taking place in many South Asian nations including India.
- The jobless in the entire region will continue to increase, the **ILO's World Employment Outlook report** pointed out.
- High incidence of informality continues to undermine the prospects of further reducing working poverty in South Asia. "Informality affects around 90 per cent of all workers in India, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Nepal," the report said.
- Globally, however, unemployment is likely to go down slightly to 192.3 million jobless people in 2018 compared to 192.7 million in 2017.

High 'informality':

- Partially driven by the high shares of employment in agriculture
- Informality also remains pervasive in the non-agriculture sectors such as construction, wholesale and retail trade, and accommodation and food service industries.

Vulnerable employment:

- Vulnerable employment, as per the ILO, is a measure of persons who are employed under relatively precarious circumstances and are less likely to have formal work arrangements, access to benefits or social protection programmes and are more "at risk" to economic cycles.
- The report also pointed out that a lot of jobs being created are of poor quality despite strong economic growth and some 72 per cent of workers in South Asia will have vulnerable employment by 2019.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/unemployment-in-india-china-to-rise-over-next-two-years-ilo/article10048615.ece>

TAPI pipeline

Part of: GS Mains Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- \$15-billion TAPI (Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India) Pipeline is also called Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline.

- The pipeline originates from Turkmenistan's Galkynysh field having gas reserves of 16 trillion cubic feet.
- The project is being funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).
- It is slated to connect central Asia with south Asia covering 1,814 km.
- Out of the total 1,814 km., the pipeline will run for 214 km in Turkmenistan, 774 km in Afghanistan along the Kandahar-Herat highway, 826 km in Pakistan through Quetta and Multan and finally reaching the settlement of Fazilka, in India located near the India-Pakistan border.

Renewed interest:

- India will be participating at a ground-breaking ceremony on 23rd Feb for TAPI at Afghanistan that will mark the beginning of formal round of talks amongst the participating countries on the pipeline
- The Turkmen President has also urged the business community of Uzbekistan to participate in the project.
- The Saudis are also now taking keen interest in TAPI. The Saudi government is investing heavily in the project from the Saudi Development Fund.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/india-begins-to-get-active-on-tapi-gas-pipeline/article10048616.ece>

India in bottom five in the Environmental Performance Index, 2018

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Environment, pollution and degradation

Key pointers:

- India is among the bottom five countries on the Environmental Performance Index 2018, plummeting 36 points from 141 in 2016.
- While India is at the bottom of the list in the environmental health category, it ranks 178 out of 180 as far as air quality is concerned.
- Its overall low ranking — 177 among 180 countries — was linked to poor performance in the environment health policy and deaths due to air pollution categories.
- The report deaths attributed to ultra-fine PM2.5 pollutants have risen over the past decade and are estimated at 1,640,113 annually in India.
- Switzerland leads the world in sustainability, followed by France, Denmark, Malta and Sweden in the EPI, which found that air quality is the leading environmental threat to public health.

- Overall, India (at 177) and Bangladesh (179) come in near the bottom of the rankings, with Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nepal rounding out the bottom five.\
- Despite government action, pollution from solid fuels, coal and crop residue burning, and emissions from motor vehicles continue to severely degrade the air quality for millions of Indians.

The EPI report:

- It is a biennial report released by Yale and Columbia Universities along with the World Economic Forum.
- The 10th EPI report ranks 180 countries on 24 performance indicators across 10 categories covering environmental health and ecosystem vitality.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/india-ranks-177-out-of-180-in-environmental-performance-index/article22513016.ece>

Reforms roadmap for public sector banks

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indian Economy

Key pointers:

- The government has announced a reforms roadmap for public sector banks and details of how Rs 80,000 crore of funds raised through recapitalisation bonds will be allocated to 20 PSBs.
- Alongside the fund infusion, the government announced a set of measures to keep a close watch on the asset quality of the banks, including “specialised monitoring” by agencies for corporate loans of more than Rs 250 crore.
- A total of around Rs 1 lakh crore will be infused in the PSBs by March-end, which comprise Rs 80,000 crore via recapitalisation bonds, Rs 8,139 crore through gross budgetary support and Rs 10,312 crore of funds raised from the market.
- Banks have been asked to ring-fence cash flows of corporate borrowers, to ensure that their earnings are not diverted for other purposes.
- The government has also mandated each of the PSBs to have a stressed assets management vertical and monetise their non-core assets such as real estate to boost their capital adequacy.
- To ensure that banks comply with the reforms parameters, the government said that an independent agency will conduct an Annual EASE (Enhanced Access & Service Excellence) Index Survey of banks, the results of which will be made public.

- As per the EASE plan, the government wants to ensure that there is a banking facility within 5 km of every village in the country.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/business/banking-and-finance/psbs-bank-recapitalisation-sbi-idbi-uco-rbi-finance-5037556/>

SC to states: Implement Disabilities Act, 2016

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues related to health

Key pointers:

- The Supreme Court has asked all states and union territories (UTs) to implement within three months, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 on the rights of persons with disabilities.
- In 2016, amendments were made in Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 and the apex court had asked states and UTs to implement provisions of new Act.
- As compared to the 1995 Act, various new provisions have been included in the 2016 Act and it has expanded the horizon of the rights of such persons, Singh said.
- The court had said that 2016 Act is a “sea change in the perception” and exhibits a march forward look with regard to persons with disabilities and roles of state governments, local authorities, educational institutes and companies are given there.

Article link: https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/sc-asks-states-to-implement-act-on-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/story-PF6pieEsKDMXrfxL0rUUOP.html?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

National Voters' Day

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Polity

Key pointers:

- 25th January is celebrated as National Voters' Day throughout India.
- National Voter's Day aims at increasing the enrolment of voters, especially encourage participation of newly eligible young voter (18-19 year old) and ensure universal adult franchise.
- 25th January, the Foundation Day of Election Commission of India (ECI), was declared as the National Voters' Day in the year 2011.

Article link: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/national-voters-day-know-about-history-importance-and-celebrations-this-year-1803730>

Global Centre for Cybersecurity

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues related to cybersecurity

Key pointers:

- In a bid to safeguard the world from hackers and growing data breaches — especially from nation-states — the World Economic Forum (WEF) has announced a new Global Centre for Cybersecurity.
- Headquartered in Geneva, the centre will become operational from March.
- The centre will help bring all the stakeholders together in ensuring cybersecurity.
- Cyber breaches recorded by businesses are on the rise. In the last five years, these have almost doubled to an average of 130 breaches per business in 2017.
- As a borderless problem, urgent action is needed to create a safe operating environment for new technologies like Artificial Intelligence, robotics, drones, self-driving cars and the Internet of Things (IoT), the WEF said.
- The global centre will be an excellent opportunity to safeguard verticals like automotive and health care where wireless connectivity is the key.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/wef-launches-global-centre-for-cybersecurity/article22508098.ece>

Delhi Declaration

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International cooperation

Counter-terrorism was discussed on the sidelines of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit held to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of sectoral dialogue between two sides.

Key pointers:

- A comprehensive statement targeting terrorism and agreed to uphold freedom in the maritime domain.
- Focusing on the presence of the Islamic State and other forms of radicalism in the region, a joint statement, titled Delhi Declaration, was issued after the plenary session.

- It supported a common approach to counter terrorism.
- It sought a comprehensive approach to combat terrorism through close cooperation by disrupting and countering terrorists, terrorist groups and networks, including by countering cross border movement of terrorists and foreign terrorist fighters and misuse of Internet including social media by terror entities.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/delhi-declaration-calls-for-joint-fight-against-terror/article22524961.ece>

'Stree Swabhiman' initiative

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Women empowerment

Key pointers:

- 'Stree Swabhiman' aims to create a sustainable model for providing adolescent girls and women an access to affordable sanitary products by leveraging CSCs.
- An initiative by CSC on women's health and hygiene.
- Under the 'Stree Swabhiman' project, sanitary napkin micro manufacturing units are being set up at CSCs across India, particularly those operated by women entrepreneurs.
- Besides promoting women's health and hygiene, the initiative will also provide employment opportunities to women in rural communities as each facility will employ 8-10 women.

Village Level Entrepreneurs:

- Over 46,500 women are working as VLEs through the CSCs across the country.
- They are offering services like Aadhaar, banking, insurance and promoting digital literacy in rural India.
- Village entrepreneurs operating Common Services Centers (CSCs) have the power to transform India by empowering locals and creating employment opportunities in rural India, IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.
- "Women have played a crucial role as change agents under the Digital India programme," the release added.

Article link: <http://www.bloncampus.com/news-wrap/cscs-can-transform-india-create-rural-jobs-it-min/article10053001.ece>

Jan Aushadhi Scheme

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions**Key pointers:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the medicines that are sold in government-run medical shops are 50-90 per cent cheaper compared to the branded ones and they strictly adhere to the international norms prescribed by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Medical stores called 'Jan Aushadhi Kendras' are being run under the government's 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Yojana'.
- The motive behind this scheme is to make healthcare affordable and encouraging Ease of Living.
- Over 3,000 such shops are operational across the country.
- It has led not only to availability of cheaper medicines, but also new employment opportunities for individual entrepreneurs.

Article link: <http://www.uniindia.com/jan-aushadhi-scheme-a-step-towards-bringing-affordable-healthcare-pm-in-mann-ki-baat/india/news/1119772.html>

10 'champion' sectors identified to boost job generation**Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Inclusive development****Key pointers:**

- In an effort to boost job generation to double-digit level, the government has identified 10 'champion' sectors that will drive growth under the 'Make in India' version 2.0, as per the Economic Survey 2017-18.
- These include capital goods, auto and auto components, defence and aerospace, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and medical devices, chemicals, electronic system, design and manufacturing (ESDM), leather and footwear, textiles and apparels, food processing, gems and jewellery, new and renewable energy, construction, shipping and railways.
- Employment generation, including finding good jobs for the young and burgeoning workforces, especially for women, will be one of the three key areas in the medium-term.
- Promoting "inclusive employment" in order to generate jobs for daily wage labourers. Steps have already been taken in sectors such as steel, apparel, leather and power to address specific challenges associated with each of them.

Article link: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article22582494.ece>

Quota for the disabled

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions in important sectors

Key pointers:

- People with autism, mental illnesses, intellectual disability and victims of acid attacks will now get quota in central government jobs.
- In case of direct recruitment, four per cent of the total number of vacancies, up from the existing three per cent, in groups A, B and C shall be reserved for people with benchmark disabilities.
Benchmark disability means a person with not less than forty per cent of a specified disability.
- The move to enhance reservation quota for those with learning disability and acid attack victims comes after passage of the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016**, and the notification of relevant rules in this regard.
- Under the new rules, all government organisations have been asked to appoint '**grievance redressal officers**' to look into complaints.
- Any person aggrieved with any matter relating to discrimination in employment against any person with disability may file a complaint with the grievance redressal officer of the respective government establishment.

Article link: <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/acid-attack-victims-to-get-quota-in-central-govt-jobs/20180128.htm>

Simultaneous Elections: Pros & Cons

Part of: Mains GS Paper II-

Key pointers:

The idea of simultaneous Lok Sabha, Assembly and local body:

- The Justice B P Jeevan Reddy-headed Law Commission in 1997 recommended simultaneous elections.
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2016 suggested that “elections to all state Assemblies whose terms end prior to or after a time period of six months to one year from the appointed election date can be clubbed together”.

How exactly will holding Lok Sabha and Assembly polls together help?

- It will cut costs.
- Frequent elections and campaigns hurt the federal structure as leaders are “forced to talk politically”. This point was raised by PM Modi.
- Many have argued that election campaigns end up sharpening fault lines of caste, religion and community across the country.
- The Model Code of Conduct puts on hold all development programmes. Simultaneous elections would reduce disturbance from political rallies, etc.
- It would free up large numbers of security personnel and other staff.

Criticism:

- Amending the Constitution to effect simultaneous elections would fundamentally alter its democratic and federal character.
- India is a “Union of States”, states have their own directly elected governments, and fixing a term adversely affects this right.
- Logistics issues. The deployment of security forces and officials in 700,000 polling stations located in widely varying geographic and climatic conditions all at the same time will be extremely difficult.
- State and national elections are often fought on different sets of issues — and in simultaneous elections, voters may end up privileging one set over the other in ways they might not have done otherwise. This could lead to national issues being ignored, or, conversely, local issues being swept away by a national ‘wave’.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/holding-lok-sabha-and-assembly-polls-together-how-idea-came-what-implementation-will-mean-5045403/>

Simultaneous Elections: Pros & Cons

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions in important sectors related to health

Key pointers:

- The Indian government has asked the Supreme Court to classify tobacco as “res extra commercium”, a Latin phrase meaning “outside commerce”.
- This would strip the \$11 billion tobacco industry’s legal right to trade. In denying an industry’s legal standing to trade, it gives authorities more leeway to impose restrictions.

- The effort is aimed at deterring tobacco companies from challenging tough new regulations.

Main focus:

- Tobacco consumption kills more than 9,00,000 people each year in India.
- The government has in recent years raised tobacco taxes, started smoking cessation campaigns and introduced laws requiring covering most of the package in health warnings.
- India's tobacco labelling rules, which mandate 85 percent of a cigarette pack's surface be covered in health warnings, have been a sticking point between the government and the tobacco industry since they were enforced in 2016.
- The industry estimates 45.7 million people in India depend on tobacco for their living.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/with-roman-law-precept-india-steps-to-stub-out-tobacco-industry-rights/article22597369.ece>

Best Wishes!

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