



IASbaba's

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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 **35th edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **April 2018** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams-2016-2017/>

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

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

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

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

Must Read Articles: We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams-2016-2017/>

"Today is the beginning of whatever you want"

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NATIONAL

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Issues relating to development and management of Social sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*

CBSE Paper Leak: Credibility of the examination system in India

What happened?

Question papers for few subjects of Class 10 and Class 12 board exams were leaked recently. The lowest moment in the 55-year-old existence of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is ongoing.

Background:

The CBSE has assiduously built a great reputation since 1962 as one of the most credible examining bodies in the world.

- Its reputation and conduct explains its expansion from a body that catered initially to the educational needs of students, whose parents were employed in the central government and had transferable jobs, to an agency that has 19,350 schools in India and 211 schools abroad under its ambit.
- The use of NCERT's standardised syllabus and globally acceptable grade point system have enhanced the board's reputation.
- Today, it conducts the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), which determines admission to IITs and other top engineering colleges.

Issue:

The sacred thread that binds a student, her faith in examinations and the fairness with which it is conducted, can never be traded.

If question papers are leaked, the children feel deeply cheated by the system as they see the perpetrators benefiting either a small or a large group from amongst them and gaining an unfair advantage over the others.

Children and parents invest everything when the examinations are a major event in a student's life.

Immediate remedy:

As per the Board, In the case of Class 12 Economics paper, a repeat examination is to be held throughout the country while the re-examination of the Class 10 Maths paper is being limited to only Delhi, NCR and Haryana.

Repeat examinations should be held within a week's time in order to mollify the children's examination trauma and better plan the future. Holding it a month or two later would subject them to great stress. Besides, there are several other tests leading to professional studies, all in the months of May and June.

We need student-centric solutions. Making them administrator-centric or even technology-centric can be counterproductive and unfair to say the least.

Way ahead:**Preventing leakage:**

There are some age-old methods to prevent such occurrences like:

- Setting multiple papers by unrelated examiners from different places.
- Using encrypted codes.
- Using special sealing techniques, which when broken leave a trail.
- Pro-actively substituting a paper at the hint of trouble and so on.
- Setting multiple papers stored at two to three locations and changing the paper sets at the last minute as a practice.
- Judiciously avoiding paper setters and examiners who either coach at home or outside for a fee.
- Using hexa-decimal mnemonics randomly generated to code and encrypt the papers.
- Bar coding and use of light-sensitive paints that leave a tamper trail.

All this requires training and a greater understanding of the art of paper setting so that the level of difficulty of each set of papers is assuredly similar.

Using technology:

- The use of technology where paper sets reach various centres through the Internet and are only made available through an encrypted code a few minutes before the examination. The requirement for a robust internet system and sufficient bandwidth would be a non-negotiable for the success of this practise.
- A significant reform would be to re-look at the entire paradigm of examinations and assess if the whole or a part of the process can be completely engaged as a proctored online event in the future, as the IT infrastructure ramps up.

Granting autonomy to the CBSE:

The CBSE is not created by an act of Parliament. Its overall controlling authority is vested with the Secretary, School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India. The Board is answerable to its governing body and functions through various committees that are advisory in nature.

A proposal to make the CBSE autonomous, with a pan-India jurisdiction covering schools affiliated to it, was mooted in 2012. But this piece of legislation never saw the light of Parliament.

If we need a credible system in place, making the CBSE an autonomous body, headed by eminent academics of impeccable reputation and track record, is of utmost importance.

Conclusion:

As the CBSE focuses on the next step, the agency should not lose sight of the task of fixing accountability.

This concerns the lives of students who are the future of this country. Nobody should be allowed to trivialise this.

Connecting the dots:

- Recent CBSE board exams paper leakage raises questions regarding credibility of the examination system in India. Suggest measures to avoid occurrence of such incidents in future.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General studies 1:

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

General studies 2:

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

Improving public spaces in India

Introduction:

Public spaces are defined by UN-Habitat as “all places, including streets, publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive”.

Public spaces yields benefits of greater inclusion, safety, democratic engagement, quality of life, gender parity and economic returns.

Sustainable Development Goal 11, sustainable cities and communities, focuses on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by providing “universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces”.

Sorry state of public spaces in India:

A study on public spaces in Mumbai highlights that merely 1.28 sq. m of the city’s public space is available per person whereas all major global cities provide healthy public space: for instance, London (31.68 sq. m), New York (26.4), and Chicago (17.6).

There is a growing and palpable demand that India should expedite its efforts on the availability of, and access to, public spaces.

Issue:

The real problem lies in identifying the policies that could achieve the desirable level of public space.

In 2015, UN-Habitat also launched the “Global Public Space Toolkit: From Global Principles To Local Policies and Practice”. However, the trouble lies in picking practical, actionable and realistic policy measures and replicating them as per the Indian local context.

What needs to be done?

- Cities should direct meaningful focus and resources towards **non-motorized transport (NMT)**.
Cities can identify key markets, bustling roads and transport junctions and only allow non-motorized transport during one day of the week. This will unleash the humanist element of our cities, where people would gather, but without the symbol of exclusivity and private space—automobiles.
- The city administration can identify streets, sidewalks, neighbourhoods, marketplaces and places of historical importance, and allocate them for cultural expression. Reviving the cultural scene can usher gains in tourism, social cohesion, and liveliness.
- The state and local governments should work on leveraging privately-owned public spaces (POPS), also referred to as pseudo-public spaces. These are owned and managed privately but provide access to the public. Shopping malls are an example of such spaces.
- Private neighbourhoods should be encouraged by municipalities to adopt nearby public spaces.

This could be a win-win situation, since there is evidence that well-managed and planned public spaces bolster the prices of nearby residential neighbourhoods.

- We need to rejuvenate the existing inventory of public spaces- parks, beaches, historical landmarks, places of worship, and centuries-old architecture. Indian public spaces can be revived if the government addresses the four basic needs of infrastructure, hygiene, security, and accessibility.
- Cities should target the conversion of old infrastructure, wastelands, landfills and other such places into public places.
Such a move will minimize the cost of developing a new public space. This effort should also involve reversing the encroachment of city water bodies such as ponds, beaches, mangroves and seafronts.

Conclusion:

With the above mentioned measures, the state of public spaces in Indian cities can be improved. These measures provide early and easy gains on the issue of public spaces in Indian cities.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the importance of improving public spaces in India. Also suggests ways to do so.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Issues relating to development and management of Social sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.*

Granting autonomy to educational institutions: Issues with latest policy

Introduction:

A new scheme of greater autonomy to educational institutions has been announced.

- Depending on the NAAC scores the institutions will be slotted in category I, II and lower.
- There will be less autonomy as the rank declines.
- Those in the highest category will have the freedom to start new courses, hire foreign faculty and pay higher emoluments to faculty.

So, some will have more freedom but others will have even less.

Autonomy has been identified as the key to improving the quality of higher education in India.

Would the current move lead to high quality higher education?

Issue:

Can “standards be achieved by standardisation”?

UGC and its committees have become the arbiter of standards and all institutions are expected to fall in line.

This includes the points an academic had to collect under the API system to get promoted, the degrees and tests needed to become a teacher and so on. Teachers had to be upgraded periodically through training institutions. The entire structure of teaching-learning was progressively determined by the UGC. With each pay commission, there were more and more regulations and diktats.

The quality of education has not improved with all these standards. Institutions have deteriorated in quality.

Understanding what makes an institution great:

- Great institutions of learning accept that knowledge is not ready made and has multiple sources.
- Different people have different ways of learning and producing knowledge. Someone may publish many papers each year while some may publish a seminal work in a decade.

Nobel Prize winner Higgs (God particle fame) said for the first 15 years at Cambridge he did not publish anything.

What is required?

- A multiplicity of approaches are needed for knowledge to advance.
- In higher education a great deal of freedom is required to generate ideas.

What does autonomy mean in real terms?

Autonomy implies the freedom to pursue one's own path of knowledge generation.

- Teachers in higher education institutions need to devise their own courses to teach the perspective they feel best reflects the subject — standardised courses, like in schools, are undesirable.
- Good teaching and research go hand in hand. This requires commitment which comes when academics have autonomy.

- Academic autonomy must filter down. The institution must have autonomy from external pressures, the department must have autonomy from the head of the institution and the teacher from the head of the department.

Why the latest move is not a step in right direction?

The latest move to provide graded autonomy to institutions will curtail the autonomy of academics in these institutions.

- The institutions will have to generate their own funds for many of the freedoms they are being granted. So, they would be subject to the dictates of the market.
- Consequently, professional courses may get money but not the core social sciences or sciences. There would be pressure to move towards paying courses.
- Those not catering to the markets would be marginalised and the generation of the socially relevant knowledge would decline.

Conclusion:

The idea of becoming world class implies that our institutions would have to create facilities that prevail in the advanced countries to attract faculty and students from there. In a poor country like India this would result into drain of resources from other institutions. The new policy confuses the autonomy for individual faculty members with that for the institution, that too truncated by the dictates of markets.

Connecting the dots:

- A new scheme of greater autonomy to educational institutions has been announced recently. Analyze how far the policy will help in making higher educational institutions in India 'great'.

NATIONAL

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.***

[India's forest policy: Issues with latest draft](#)

Introduction:

India's Forest Policy was last revised in 1988 and thus changes are overdue. The new draft Forest Policy 2018, however, ignores the lessons from this period and returns to the state-managed forestry of the 1950s, but with a neoliberal twist.

Background:

- India's diverse forests support the livelihoods of 250 million people, providing them firewood, fodder, bamboo, beedi leaves and many other products. The timber currently benefits the state treasury.
 - Forests also regulate stream flows and sediment, benefitting downstream communities.
 - Finally, they provide global benefits of biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- However, these multiple goods and services, flowing to different beneficiaries, cannot be simultaneously maximised.

Forest policy, therefore, focusses on-

- Which benefits (and beneficiaries) to prioritise, where and through what process.
- Decide when and through what process to allow diversion of forest land for "non-forest" activities such as dam building, mining and agriculture.

Evolution of forest policy:

Forest policy in colonial India:

It focussed on maximising products and revenues for the state through the imperial forest department as sole owner, protector and manager of the forest estate. Unfortunately, post-Independence policy continued this statist approach. Forests were seen as sources of raw material for industry and local communities were simply treated as labour.

The 1988 Forest Policy:

In a paradigm shift, the 1988 Forest Policy recognised the multiple roles of forests and *prioritised environmental stability over revenue maximisation*. It also *acknowledged that the needs of forest-dependent communities* must be the "first charge" on forest produce.

Equally important, the policy emphasised *people's involvement in protecting and regenerating forests*, thus formally recognising the limitations of state-managed forestry.

Post-1988 experience:

Joint forest management (JFM) was initiated in the 1990s to implement the concept of people's involvement.

But what began with great expectations eventually ended up being fake.

- Foresters created thousands of village forest committees but severely limited their autonomy and jurisdictions.
- Donor money was spent on plantations but activities were stopped once funds ran out.
- "People's participation" by executive order was too weak and lopsided a concept. Instead what was required was substantive devolution of control over forests.

The 1990s also saw the Supreme Court getting involved in forest governance. To regulate forest diversions, it introduced a high '*net present value*' (NPV) charge on the lands diverted. But the court refused to assign any role to local communities affected by such diversion, not even a share in the NPV received.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006:

It created a historic opportunity for devolution.

- Its community forest resource provisions gave communities rights to both access and manage forests. Today, thousands of villages in Maharashtra and Odisha have received these rights, and hundreds have begun to exercise them.
- The FRA democratised the diversion process by requiring community concurrence for forest diversion once community forest rights are recognised. The Adivasis of Niyamgiri in Odisha exercised this provision to prevent bauxite mining in their sacred hill tracts.

The 2018 Forest Policy draft:

Highlighting the decline in forest productivity, it identifies "production forestry" and plantations as the "new thrust area". Forest development corporations are to be the institutional vehicle. They will now enter into public-private partnerships (PPPs) to bring corporate investment into forest lands.

Issue:

- In the past, production forestry led to replacing natural oak forests with pine monocultures in the Himalayas, natural sal forests with teak plantations in central India, and wet evergreen forests with eucalyptus and acacia in the Western Ghats. All this has decimated

diversity, dried up streams and undermined local livelihoods. PPPs will entail more such destruction, with even the profits ending up in corporate hands.

- There is little about decentralised governance in the draft policy though the term “community participation” is used, but not seriously.
- The draft talks of “ensuring synergy” between gram sabhas and JFM committees, when the need is to replace JFM committees with statutorily empowered gram sabhas, and revamp the colonial-era Indian Forest Act by incorporating FRA provisions.

Conclusion:

There is a need of revamping India's forest policy. But the latest draft overlooks the ecological and social implications of carbon and production forestry and the need for decentralised democracy. Thus, there is a need to have a re-look.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss how India's forest policy has evolved over time. Also discuss the concerns associated with the new draft Forest Policy 2018.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General studies 1:

- *Urbanization and related issues*

General studies 2:

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

[Improving the representation of urban constituencies in decision-making](#)

Background:

The present delimitation of constituencies in India has been done on the basis of the 2001 census under the provisions of Delimitation Act, 2002. Delimitation commissions have been set up four times in the past—1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002—under Delimitation Commission Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002. The government had suspended delimitation in 1976 until after the 2001 census so that states' family planning programmes would not affect their political representation in the Lok Sabha. This had led to wide discrepancies in the size of constituencies, with the largest having over

three million electors, and the smallest less than 50,000. The Constitution of India was specifically amended in 2002 not to have delimitation of constituencies till the first census after 2026.

Delimitation of constituencies and Urban governance:

The above is extremely relevant to the urban governance in India, where the national and state governments hold the power and purse strings to urban planning and policy.

This has led to inefficient governance and even neglect of cities, a dangerous trend in a nation that is urbanizing somewhat quickly.

The government should re-examine the way constituencies are re-drawn based on population growth in India's next delimitation exercise, to be held after 2026.

Urbanization rate in India:

33% of Indians live in cities. By 2040, the urbanization will be at 40%. China will grow from being 50-70% urban.

Latin American, North American and European counterparts are already over 70% urban. All indications and future projections suggest that India will not urbanize as quickly as some Latin American nations. Several uniquely Indian factors, such as a lack of jobs and land holdings in villages, however small, are all reasons for a slower rate.

The period of transition will likely be 30-50 years, and governance during this time will be complicated and challenging.

Issues:

- At present, local governments and urban dwellers don't have much say in the urban planning apparatus, and urban under-representation at state and national levels is leading to political neglect.

For example, in Maharashtra, India's most urbanized state, 47% of the populace lives in urban constituencies and yet, these constituencies hold only 31% of assembly seats.

- According to India's 11th Five Year Plan (2005-2011), between 2005 and 2011, national funds allocated for rural development were 11 times the amount allocated for urban development.

In that period, urban population growth surpassed rural population growth for the first time in India's history.

- In India, the lack of proportional representation of cities in state governments is a big challenge.

Even if we have elected mayors, they will not have the ability to seek necessary resources from states due to the lack of representation and will always be dictated by the state's chief minister.

For truly empowered mayors to get elected, political representation has to align with population representation at the state and national level.

Conclusion:

One way to address this challenge would be to improve the representation of urban constituencies in decision-making. This can be done through delimitation, the process of redrawing constituency boundaries based on population. India should ensure that the delimitation process is not delayed too much beyond 2026.

Connecting the dots:

- There is a need to improve the representation of urban constituencies in decision-making. This can be attained by ensuring the delimitation process is not delayed by 2026. Discuss.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

Rooftop solar revolution led by DISCOMs: The SRISTI scheme

Background:

India's rooftop solar ambitions are yet to gather momentum. Incentives offered by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) in the form of capital subsidies and a net metering policy, which allow consumers to sell excess power to distribution companies (DISCOMs), have failed to catalyse rapid deployment.

- Capacity addition in rooftop solar stood at around 870 megawatt (MW) in 2017, as compared to the targeted 5,000 MW for FY 2017-18.
- As of December 2017, cumulative rooftop solar installed capacity was only 1.6 GW.

At the current pace of deployment, rooftop solar installations are unlikely to cross even 10 GW by 2022, far short of the targeted 40 GW under India's National Solar Mission.

The Sustainable Rooftop Implementation for Solar Transfiguration of India (SRISTI) scheme:

It was announced recently. The SRISTI scheme is an evolutionary step towards a DISCOM-driven model of rooftop solar adoption. This scheme can incentivise DISCOMs to lead a rooftop solar revolution.

Jobs potential:

The scaling up of rooftop solar offers great socio-economic benefits. As per estimates by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the deployment of rooftop solar creates 24.7 full-time equivalent jobs per MW, significantly higher than the corresponding figure of 3.5 jobs per MW for utility-scale solar. Realising 40 GW target would provide employment to 2,38,000 people.

Issue:

DISCOMs, however, consider rising rooftop solar penetration as a threat to their business. Rooftop deployment, especially in the commercial and industrial category, has a two-fold impact on DISCOMs' businesses-

- A reduction in demand for grid electricity leads to revenue losses.
- Since this segment cross-subsidises residential and agricultural consumers, these revenue losses compound the financial burden on DISCOMs.

Over the past 10 years, tariffs for grid power have risen at an annual rate of 7 per cent. On the other hand, the costs of rooftop solar systems and battery technologies have been declining. As their competitiveness improves further, an increasing share of consumers will make the shift away from grid power.

The SRISTI scheme represents the perfect means for DISCOMs to capitalise on the opportunity presented by rooftop solar. The proposed Rs. 14,400-crore incentive fund under the scheme would compensate DISCOMs for their revenue losses.

Way ahead:

In order to maximize the benefits for DISCOMs, we propose five ideas that could accelerate rooftop solar deployment.

- There is a need to debunk the narrative of rooftop solar being a threat to the DISCOM business. Adoption of rooftop solar within the boundaries of the distribution network offers certain inherent economic benefits to DISCOMs. Solar generation close to the point of consumption lowers transmission and distribution losses.

Further, targeted solar deployment in select geographies could minimise the problems of

grid overloading, thereby lowering the requirements of investment for upgradation of distribution infrastructure.

- DISCOMs must raise consumer awareness to create demand for rooftop solar. Given their limited penetration, solar PV systems are still an unfamiliar technology for many. Further, the lack of awareness of various incentive schemes and processes also contributes to the problem of weak demand. Moreover, many consider it as an expensive alternative to grid electricity despite solar tariffs dipping below Rs. 5 per kWh for small-scale projects.

DISCOMs could utilise their existing bill collection and payment networks to disseminate information, thus reducing a major barrier to rooftop solar adoption.

- DISCOMs could enable developers to expand their service areas beyond their regional geographies.

Given the widespread network of DISCOMs, they could provide certain additional services to developers such as bill collection and operations and maintenance. The opportunities for these services are the greatest in remote areas where such services are prohibitively expensive for developers.

Such facilities also offer opportunities for building new revenue streams to DISCOMs.

Conclusion:

DISCOMs have been unwilling participants in India's rooftop solar revolution so far. However, an alignment of interests could see DISCOMs champion the cause of rooftop solar.

Connecting the dots:

- At the current pace of deployment, rooftop solar installations are unlikely to cross even 10 GW by 2022, far short of the targeted 40 GW under India's National Solar Mission. DISCOMs can be a game changer and the SRISTI scheme launched recently shows the way. Discuss.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.*
- *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.*

General Studies 3:

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

Terms of reference of the 15th Finance Commission: Issues**Introduction:**

Most federations in the world have arrangements for the mobilisation and devolution of resources.

In India, the Constitution provides for the appointment of a Finance Commission every five years to recommend methodology to share resources such that the fiscal space of the constituents, especially the States, is well protected.

The terms of reference of the 15th Finance Commission are thus a matter of utmost importance to the resources available to the States of India.

Concerns:

The terms of reference of this Commission have created apprehension among States about principles of fairness and equity in the distribution of public resources for development.

Vital**for****unity:**

The foremost objective of the Finance Commission is an equitable distribution of financial resources between the two units of the Union. In the allocation of duties (7th schedule of the constitution) between the Centre and the States, fundamental tasks of enhancing human development, income growth, livelihoods, and protecting and sustaining the environment are entrusted to the States. However, although these major tasks of nation-building are the duty of the States, the resources to finance them are substantially controlled by the Centre.

Issues:**Asymmetry in the federal system:**

The States in India today neither have the resources to fulfil their tasks as laid down in the Constitution, nor do they have the right to raise such resources. There is thus a great asymmetry in India's federal system. The Centre's capacity to mobilise resources is far greater than that of the States, but the latter are required to undertake development expenditures that far exceed their revenue generating capabilities.

The Constitution of India entrusts the Finance Commission with the responsibility of addressing

this

anomaly.

In the wake of demonetisation and GST:

The devolution of resources by the 15th Finance Commission assumes further significance in the current environment, in which the finances of States have received a double blow in the form of demonetisation and the Goods and Services Tax (GST). The freedom of States to raise resources has been restricted by the introduction of the GST. They now have hardly any major tax left with them to make a difference to State resources.

Demographic differences:

Using the population data of 2011 as the base for tax devolution should not reduce the allocation of resources to States that have successfully reduced their rate of population growth. These States have incurred huge fiscal costs in order to achieve a lower population growth and healthy demographic indicators. They have made substantial investments on education, health and directly on family welfare programmes. Many States of India today have achieved a replacement rate of growth of population or have gone below that rate in a short span of time. An immediate effect of this is a sharp rise in the proportion of elderly in the population. The care of the elderly is the responsibility of State governments.

The enhanced costs of such care must be considered by the Commission in making its awards and in deciding the population criterion to be used.

Beyond the constitutional mandate:

The current terms of reference go far beyond the constitutional mandate of the Finance Commission.

- They intensify efforts to use the Finance Commission as an instrument of fiscal consolidation and to impose the ideological and economic agenda of the Central government on the States.
- It is not the task of a Finance Commission to recommend “road maps for fiscal management” or to impose its perception of what policies are good for the people of the States.

That is for democratically elected State governments to decide.

- The terms of reference explicitly privilege the “committed expenditures” of the Centre.

Performance-based incentives:

The terms of reference are unprecedented in asking the 15th Finance Commission to consider proposing performance-based incentives beyond those relating to fiscal responsibility, population and devolution to local bodies.

This reflects the viewpoint and ideological inclinations of the Central government and is an attempt to micro-manage the fiscal domain of the State governments.

For the Finance Commission to propose “measurable performance-based-incentives” is an attack on the federal structure mandated by the Constitution. It is not the duty of the Finance Commission to venture into the realm of day-to-day governance. The elected governments of States will decide what policies are appropriate for our people.

Conclusion:

India’s great wealth rests in its diversity. To recognise this diversity is also to recognise that States will follow diverse paths of development. The Finance Commission must facilitate diversity and a democratic path of development by respecting principles of equity and fairness in allocating resources between the Centre and States in India.

Connecting the dots:

- Various concerns have been raised regarding the Terms of Reference of the 15th Finance Commission. Discuss these concerns.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General studies 2:

- ***Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary***

[Judicial reforms must come from within the judiciary](#)

In news:

The letter by Justice Kurian Joseph to the Chief Justice of India, also sent to 22 companion justices, requests for a bench of seven justices to be formed to “suo motu take up the matter of the government sitting on the two names” for proposed elevation. The prolonged silence, writes Justice Kurian Joseph, imperils the “life and existence” of the court. And he adds, “history would not pardon” it were the court to do nothing to question this kind of governmental conduct.

Background:

- The first constitutional amendment under the present regime enacted the National Judicial Commission with a facilitating Act. Both the constitutional amendment and the Act were struck down by a five-judge bench with a 4:1 decision on the ground that while the amendment affected judicial review as an aspect of the “basic structure” of the Constitution, the Act, in effect, diminished the “primacy” of the CJI and the collegium.
- The court went an extra mile to ask the executive to propose a Memorandum of Procedure (MoP).
- More than a year has gone by, but the executive has not yet finalised it, despite reminders by the court. Instead, the executive seems to claim a power of veto over the names proposed; in doing so, it seeks to do indirectly what it could not directly — thus violating a foundational axiom of the rule of law.

Present

system:

Since the 1998 Advisory Opinion, the judicial collegium was not questioned, only the composition and the procedure of functioning were sought to be clarified. Contrary to the heavy propaganda now of judges appointing judges, the Union government had itself accepted the new collegium system of five senior-most justices. It was also accepted that the executive will convey its concerns to the CJI if a security issue was involved; if the collegium reiterated them, the names will become final. Despite occasional grapevine criticism of the collegium, the system continued in place.

Issue:

The governance tendency comprising non-response to troublesome situations seems to be on a high growth curve. The four senior-most justices had earlier pointed out, in a press conference, that the recommendations of the collegium concerning the MoP were not responded to for a long time, even though finalised by the court. The lack of response to the CJI is against the dignity of a high constitutional office, and may also entail the offence of contempt, scandalising the court.

Reform

must

come

from

within:

Any reform of the system will have to come from within the court itself. It has made a welcome beginning by posting some details on the website; but it must do more, for there is no more demanding virtue than transparency.

- There are prescribed or ordained ways of handling constitutional disagreements. Sheer assertion of the power of not responding is not one of them.

- The executive clearly holds a different view than the justices on the powers of elevation and transfer; the way ahead is to have a new and creative National Judicial Commission Act, which is acceptable to both the high organs of governance.
- The CJI should be, and must remain, in a position of robust dialogue with dissenting brethren and blend his power as master of roster with respect for the suggestions and opinions of others.

Conclusion:

Constitutional democracy is not imperilled by dissent and disagreement but by an overweening sense of power in one person or institution. The Fundamental Duties of all citizens (under Part IV-A of the Constitution) require us to interrupt power from dreams of limitless sovereignty. We need to rekindle a constitutional flame in all our institutions.

Connecting the dots:

- The issue of judicial appointments and elevation is a long pending one. The judiciary and the executive needs to come to a common ground. Also, reforms to ensure transparency must come from within the judiciary. Comment.

NATIONAL/ECONOMY

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*

The Aspirational Districts Programme

Introduction:

The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) is a radical departure from the country's previous development strategies in its scale, scope and ownership.

This landmark programme recognises the disparities in development across states and districts. It focuses on transforming 115 districts across 28 states that have witnessed the least progress along certain development parameters. These 115 districts account for more than 20% of the country's population and cover over 8,600 gram panchayats.

A radical scheme:

This is the first time that a government in India has focussed on India's most backward districts and the exercise envisages a serious re-imagination of government and governance and deepens cooperative federalism.

The programme is informed by the failures of the past and therefore has a more contemporary vision of how public services are best delivered to those who need them most.

Deliberately, the districts have been described as aspirational rather than backward so that they are viewed as islands of opportunity and hope rather than areas of distress and hopelessness.

Choosing of the 115 districts:

The 115 districts were chosen by senior officials of the Union government in consultation with State officials on the basis of a composite index of the following-

- Deprivation enumerated under the Socio-Economic Caste Census.
- Key health and education performance indicators.
- The state of basic infrastructure.

A minimum of one district was chosen from every State. The largest concentration of districts is in the States which have historically under-performed such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, or which are afflicted by left-wing extremism such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

Funding:

There is no financial package or large allocation of funds to this programme. The intent is to leverage the resources of the several government programmes that already exist but are not always used efficiently. The government doesn't always need to spend more to achieve outcomes but instead to spend better.

Key features of the programme:

Focus on district-specific strengths:

The composite district-level data allows GoI to take into account the huge variation within

India.

With districts as diverse as Dantewada and Bastar in Chhattisgarh that are affected by leftwing extremism and Baksa in Assam where access to education is a challenge, a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy will not work. For instance, the priority given to stunting will vary in Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh, where 8.1% of its under-five-year-old population is stunted, than in Rajgarh in Madhya Pradesh where nearly 39% of under-five children are stunted. The detailed data collected will allow the government to take into account the specific contexts, challenges and capacities of each district and state.

Shifting the focus to socio-economic outcomes:

The programme shifts the focus away from output and draws attention to socio-economic outcomes.

To provide an initial benchmark for the programme, the government has collected statistics on 49 indicators across five core dimensions: health and nutrition, education, financial inclusion, agriculture and water resources, skill development and basic infrastructure. Not all dimensions are considered equal in the construction of the composite index for each district, acknowledging the specific nature of India's development challenges. For example, health and nutrition and education are each given a 30% weightage in the index. These two areas account for 21 of the 49 indicators.

Placing data at the core of policymaking:

Through its large-scale efforts to collect, distill and disseminate data, the programme is grounded thoroughly in evidence. The NITI Aayog has created a dashboard to monitor real-time progress in the districts. The availability of the latest district-level statistics in the public domain is not only enhancing transparency and accountability, but it is also ensuring that policy actions are backed by evidence.

Emphasising collaboration across various levels of government:

The ADP brings together all levels of government, from central and state officers driving operations, to the district collectors implementing innovative measures on the ground. The ADP echoes the government's belief that states and districts should have a greater voice in their development. It truly embodies India's shift toward cooperative federalism. The local government is in a unique position to understand the complexities of the districts. They can experiment with different measures to enhance socio-economic development on the ground.

Therefore, district collectors play a central role in improving outcomes, monitoring progress and decision-making in their respective aspirational districts.

The state and central governments rank different districts to promote competition, augment technical capacity and share best practices with the districts.

Partnering with civil society:

The programme is a collaborative effort between government, various foundations and civil society. Through partnerships with several voluntary organisations, the programme benefits from different perspectives, technical skills and on-the-ground experience. For example, NITI Aayog is working with Piramal Foundation to strengthen public systems particularly in health and education. Similarly, Tata Trusts, IDinsight, L&T, ITC and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are also playing key roles in the programme. These public-private partnerships will help boost implementation of the programme.

Ensuring success of the programme:

- Achieving success in this programme requires three tiers of government, the Centre, States and district administrations, to work in tandem. It is necessary for the Centre and States to be involved because not all decisions can be taken at the level of district.
- On financial inclusion, the full cooperation of banks is necessary and only the Central government has leverage over them.

Conclusion:

In a way, the ADP is a big pilot programme from reorienting how government does its business of delivering development. A decisive shift in the paradigm of governance is likely to finally fulfil the many broken promises of the past.

Connecting the dots:

- The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) is a radical departure from the country's previous development strategies in its scale, scope and ownership. Analyze.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

- *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.*

Planning for internal migration due to climate change

Background:

The Syrian and Rohingya crises exemplified the typical conditions under which people are forcibly displaced: war, political persecution, economic instability and repression. Still, most of the world's migration is internal, i.e. within the same country. Among the tens of millions displaced in 2015, 21.3 million were refugees, but 40.8 million were internally displaced.

People usually change their homes to improve household income, for marriage or other purposes relating to family.

Climate change and migration:

With climate change, its worsening slow onset effects such as droughts, effects from sea level rise and water shortages, will cause many more to leave their homes and move to safer places. Such migration may be a choice in the initial stages; for instance, a young member may travel to a city close by during a drought to increase his or her family's income. But as the stress becomes more severe, the decision to move may be forced. An ongoing process-

The gradual rise in sea levels wherein people are compelled to leave their island nations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and become climate exiles is one such ongoing process that will likely increase out-migration over time.

The “Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration” report by the World Bank:

Estimates that in Latin America, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa over 143 million people would be forced to move within borders by 2050 as a result of slow onset climate events alone. In the worst-case scenario, about 40 million of these migrants would be in South Asia, which is the most populous of the regions studied, with a number of climate change effects anticipated.

South Asian (Indian) context:

- South Asia is characterised by rain-fed farmland in large parts of the region. With variability in the monsoons and warmer temperatures, crop failures will lead to migration from the Gangetic plains and from the rice-growing northeast of Bangladesh and the inundated coasts.

- While people normally gravitate to big cities, those along the coast such as Mumbai, Chennai, Chittagong and Dhaka will themselves be vulnerable to storm surges and other effects from sea level rise.
- The poor would be the worst affected by these slow onset events and most of them would migrate out of rural areas to nearby urban settlements, which would be cities and the peri-urban surroundings.
- “Hotspots” of in and out migration would be stressed for natural resources, public services and livelihoods.

In India, there are already signs of unplanned and frontier-led growth in peri-urban areas. The implications of these internal migrations will be significant for development in the areas and for the lives of these people.

What needs to be done?

- Understanding migration patterns, getting better socioeconomic data on migration and preparing in advance through appropriate planning is critical.
- Reducing GHG emissions is of utmost urgency, although that seems to be taking place at a pace determined by geopolitical as well as local initiatives.
- Integrating internal migration with ongoing development planning is vital. The peri-urban areas, which are expected to be hot spots, already show problems of water shortage, waste management, nutritional deficiency, limited services such as health and education, and poor infrastructure.
- Ecosystems, part of the natural resources in peri-urban areas, ought to be protected as “special ecological zones”, so that as urban settlements expand, they don’t eat into ecosystem services.
- Skill building, job training and other opportunities for education and jobs for locals and migrants would also have to become a focal point.
- Rights for those who are forced to migrate would be fundamental in these preparations, as studies and experience have shown that ignoring issues of social justice and equity in adaptation can lead to serious governance failure.

Connecting the dots:

- The problem of internal migration is bound to increase with ongoing climate change. The implications of these internal migrations will be significant for development in the areas and for the lives of these people. Discuss. Also suggest measures to face the challenge.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

Rural Electrification: Where we stand and What more needs to be done?

Introduction:

Despite having 16% of the global population, India's share in global energy use is only 4.2% and in global electricity consumption, 3.5%. Access to affordable electricity for each and every household is a necessary condition for social and economic development. Rural electrification has received attention in the development agenda mostly in the last one-and-a-half decades.

Government schemes:

- In 2005, the Central government launched the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) which subsumed all other ongoing schemes related to rural electrification. The scheme focused on electrification of villages through implementation of decentralized distributed generation (DDG).
- RGGVY was later included in the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) (recently renamed the Saubhagya scheme), which additionally focuses on feeder separation, improvement of sub-transmission and distribution network, and metering to reduce losses.

All these schemes have delivered results and now only a few villages are left that have yet to achieve the target of 100% electrification.

Effects of energy poverty:

Lack of access to energy at home and for income-generating activities is associated with-

- Higher levels of poverty.
 - Low productivity.
 - Heavy workload.
 - Women's safety issues.
- Energy poverty affects women and girls more as they have to bear the primary

responsibility for collecting firewood, cooking and other domestic work. These tasks expose them to negative health impacts and increase their domestic and reproductive burdens.

- Missed educational opportunities.
- High exposure to health risks.

Latest statistics on rural electrification:

As per the latest government statistics, only 910 villages are yet to be electrified, which account for 5% of India's un-electrified villages (as on April 2015), excluding some uninhabited villages. However, the performance of rural household electrification is not that encouraging. Around 35 million households—approximately 11% of the total rural households—are yet to be electrified.

Reliability and quality of power supply: Remains a concern

The success of rural electrification should not be measured only on the basis of connections provided, but also on the basis of provision of reliable and quality power supply during peak hours.

Both of these are still persistent problems faced by a majority of India's rural households. As per the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recommended "*Energy Plus*" approach, supply of electricity only for lighting is a necessary but not sufficient condition for rural livelihood development. This framework emphasizes on energy access in combination with productive use of electricity for income generation and livelihood upliftment.

Ensuring productive use of electricity:

- To use electricity directly for income-generation activities, ownership of appliances plays an important role.
- Market availability, financial and technical assistance.
- Appliance ownership, in turn, depends on the household's economic status and on the quality and availability of power supply.

The issue of high cost of power supply to rural areas:

As a majority of the rural households cannot afford high cost supply, utilities are reluctant to supply the required quality and quantity of electricity in these areas. This is apart from the issue of capacity constraint in terms of power generation/purchase.

Solution:

However, implementing some appropriate measures such as smart meters, infrastructure development, franchisee arrangements with local self-help-groups (for more effective billing, monitoring and collection) may improve the situation to some extent.

The **Saubhagya** scheme:

Aims to improve environment, public health, education and connectivity with the help of last-mile power connections across India along with providing electricity connections to over 40 million families in rural and urban areas by December. Households out of reach of the national electricity grid are proposed to be provided with solar power packs along with battery banks with the Rural Electrification Corporation as the nodal agency.

- The Saubhagya scheme will help India, the world's third-largest energy consumer after the US and China, meet its global climate change commitments as electricity will substitute kerosene for lighting.
- It will also help improve education, health, and connectivity apart from having a multiplier effect on increased economic activities and job creation.

What more needs to be done?

There is a need to explore the role of rural electrification in promoting gender equality, which, along with women empowerment, is an integral part of inclusive development and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

None of the energy access programmes in India have incorporated gender equality in what they hope to achieve.

As India is currently focusing on the achievement of SDGs, *women-centric energy access programmes* will contribute more effectively in achievement of various SDGs such as Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 3 (good health and well-being), Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy).

Conclusion:

Various government schemes have delivered results and now only a few villages are left that have yet to achieve the target of 100% electrification. A major step ahead will be ensuring productive usage of electricity and incorporating the objective of gender equality in electricity related schemes.

Connecting the dots:

- While we come a way long in electrification of rural areas. Two major focus areas, going ahead, should be- A need to explore the role of rural electrification in promoting gender equality and to ensure reliability and quality of power supply. Discuss.

NATIONAL

TOPIC**General studies 2:**

- *Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections*
- *Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*
- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector or Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources*

General studies 3:

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

Skill Development Indicators: Evidence based policy implementation**Background:**

Skill development has emerged as a key strategy to realize the potential of a young workforce with an average age of 29, by enhancing their employability.

- The National Skill Development Mission launched by the Union government envisions skilling at scale with speed and standards, with a focus on strengthening institutional training, infrastructure, convergence, training of trainers, overseas employment, sustainable livelihoods and leveraging public infrastructure.
- The national policy for skill development and entrepreneurship 2015 provides an enabling framework to realize this vision. The policy framework outlines the paradigms and enablers to realize the potential of India's demographic advantage by addressing challenges such as aspirations and mobilization of youth, quality and relevance of training; access to training, inclusivity and leveraging available technology.
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) has been introduced in India to facilitate an assessment and certification of the skills acquired by the individual through experience, observation and self-learning in order to give him/her an edge in career advancement.

Several challenges remain for skill development in India:

- The proportion of the formally trained in India is low at 4.69% of the total workforce compared to countries like Germany (75%) and South Korea (96%).
- The mismatch between skill, academic training and employment has widened, leading to a situation where, on one hand, employers are unable to find appropriately trained people, and on the other, the youth are unable to find employment that they aspire for.

- The latest India Skill Report indicates that only about 45.6% of the youth coming out of educational institutions are employable.

In order to address the mismatch between supply and demand, it is necessary to harmonize youth aspirations with industry demand and the training offered by training institutes.

Need to develop skill development indicators (SDIs):

- The significant variation in demographic profile necessitates *local interventions*. Southern states like Goa, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala have a higher median age, between the range of 29-31 years, due to early fertility transitions, and will soon be ageing. Hinterland states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan have a low median age between 20 and 22 years. Thus, this northern belt will have a rising working age population. This requires addressing skill challenges of access, equity, relevance and financing differently.
- Availability of real-time data on challenges faced by a region/area/district/state, identification of sectors requiring skilled manpower, and demand-supply match, will help assess the outcomes of various interventions undertaken thus far so that the future course of policy action can be planned or modified.

Example:

International efforts to develop indicators for skill development:

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) established the world indicators of skills for employment (WISE).

The WISE framework includes a focus on contextual factors in a country, such as the-

- Gross domestic product (GDP), population, employment in informal sector.
- Factors affecting skill acquisition, such as educational attainment, literacy rate, enrolment ratios, vocational programme, participation in training/apprenticeship.
- Factors affecting skill requirement, such as employment share by level of education, occupation, incidence of self-employment, skill use and outcomes in terms of growth in GDP, labour productivity, employment rate, earnings, etc.

Adapting from this framework, indicators must be developed to address challenges such matching skills across sectors/regions to realize the potential of our youth and the working population.

Benefits of SDIs:

- SDIs would improve the effectiveness of various platforms set-up by the ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship.

- They would also enable the states to evaluate and compete with their own past performance and facilitate sharing of best practices across different sectors and states/union territories.
- They would help assess the match between employers' needs and future labour market opportunities and based on the assessment of existing policy initiatives and their outcomes, the future course of policy action could be planned or modified.

The indicators can be classified under four broad parameters:

- The parameter of access would measure the capacity and outreach of the programmes.
- Relevance would measure the ease of entry to the labour market with an enhanced employability.
- Equity will measure the equal accessibility of the opportunity to all and quality will evaluate whether the training imparted meets the required standard of employability.
- The parameter of finance would measure the cost-effectiveness of the funding provided.

The dearth of reliable data is a pressing challenge in developing these indicators. There is a need to generate data leading up to the labour market. This can be done by systematically including key questions on skills in employment-unemployment surveys. Once the indicators are finalized, an index can be built, ranking the states based on their performance outcomes.

Conclusion:

With the advent of the fourth industrial revolution, it needs to be ensured that our youth manage the shifts in skill requirements. The need of the hour is to build evidence that can redirect policy solutions to address the constraints, make policy inclusive and sustainable according to the demographic context of each state in order to fully realize the potential of youth and ensure optimum income and employment for the workforce.

Connecting the dots:

- Despite several initiatives, skill development in India is not taking at a pace as expected. Discuss how local interventions based on evidence, skill development indicators, will help.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 1:

- ***Social empowerment***

General Studies 2:

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

Dilution of Atrocities Act: A cause of concern

Introduction:

The Supreme Court, in its recent judgment in **Subhash Kashinath Mahajan v. State of Maharashtra**, has stirred up a debate which is bound to impact the law and policy on the prohibition of the practice of untouchability and prevention of atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India.

Reference article: Dilution of Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989: SC judgement <https://iasbaba.com/2018/03/iasbabas-daily-current-affairs-prelims-mains-focus-29th-march-2018/>

As per the data:

The empirical question of whether the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 is really being misused by the filing of false cases (which is the basis for the judgment) needs to be addressed by looking at the available data.

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data show that 5,347 false cases involving SCs and 912 false cases involving STs were registered in 2016. However, it should be noted that these constituted only 9% and 10%, respectively, of the total number of cases that were to be investigated by the police in that year. This would suggest that only about one out of 10 cases filed is false. Thus, there appears to be little evidence that the Act is being rampantly misused.
- On the contrary, there is plenty of evidence to support the view that the SCs/STs are victims of rising crime each year. NCRB data show that in the past 10 years, crimes against SCs have risen by 51% (27,070 cases in 2006 and 40,801 crimes in 2016 were reported). Against STs it was by 13% (5,791 in 2006 and 6,568 cases in 2016 were reported).

Thus, there is much empirical evidence to support the stand that the Act needs to be strengthened — not weakened.

Inadequate

enforcement:

Legislation on untouchability and atrocities against SCs/STs arguably constitutes a radical departure from the usual approach of the criminal justice system.

Unlike other offences, untouchability is an offence under the Constitution — **Article 17** prescribes that ‘the enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law’. Despite the laws, it is generally accepted that Article 17 has not succeeded in achieving its mandate largely due to inadequate enforcement, in turn leading to low conviction rates and a huge pendency of cases.

Consequently, the legislative trend has been to progressively make the penal law tougher. In 2016, several amendments were introduced to strengthen the 1989 Act such as:

- Including more acts as atrocities.
- Increasing the quantum of punishment for the offences defined as atrocities.
- Imposing an enhanced duty on public servants such as police officers who are required to enforce the Act.
- Constituting special and exclusive courts to try offences under the Act.
- Introducing time limits for investigation and trial.
- Providing enhanced state machinery for arrest.
- Investigation and trial.
- Using presumptions to make convictions easier; and detailed regulation of the rights of victims and witnesses under the Act.

A study of the constitutional and legislative history relating to SCs/STs would reveal a unique jurisprudence that has evolved on the subject, which mandates a radically different and stronger approach to be adopted by the criminal justice system. In this context, the recent decision by the Supreme Court might be seen to run counter to the legislative trend of making the untouchability and atrocities laws harsher and tougher rather than softer.

Way ahead:

The ruling on anticipatory bail is to be welcomed as protecting the accused from needless arrest and humiliation and to protecting human rights.

- Ordinary police powers of registering a first information report and making arrests in cognisable cases should be whittled down in atrocity cases is a matter of deliberation.
- False and frivolous complaints filed under untouchability legislation could also have been dealt with by other means which include directions for prompt investigation and prosecution of such offences by the police and others under the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

Conclusion:

The appropriate step would be to leave the task of maintaining a delicate balance between the

enforcement of penal laws and the protection of civil liberties to Parliament, the body entrusted with the task of making our laws.

Connecting the dots:

- Dilution of Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989 by the Supreme Court goes against empirical evidence of crimes against scheduled castes and tribes. Discuss the need of Parliament to intervene so as to maintain a balance between the enforcement of penal laws and the protection of civil liberties.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

General Studies 2:

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

Organic Farming: Training the farmers

Background:

Sikkim is India's first fully organic State. It means no use of chemical pesticides, fertilisers, or genetically modified crops. What started 14 years ago as a small change in a tiny region, has now become a great example for the entire nation to learn from.

Can the entire country go organic?

- India is home to some of the most fertile and productive farmland with more than 60 per cent of the land area being arable and 58 per cent of the rural population depending primarily on agriculture for livelihood. With such an enormous potential, promoting healthier and sustainable farming practices can transform the entire nation's agronomical profile and, thereby, the nation's health index.
- Experts suggest that going organic has a positive impact on both income and profitability of farmers. Those who have tried it, have experienced the benefits beginning from overall farm health to a huge increase in productivity.

- Globally, experts suggest that organic agriculture is the future. For the western world, it is new-found treasure. For India, it is about going back to the past and picking up ancient practices.

Issue:

There is relatively lower awareness about organic farming in India. According to the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM), India stands ninth on the list of countries relying on organic farming. While most farmers don't know the harmful impacts of chemical-based farming, others understand them but do not know how to bring about the much-needed change. This is where the importance of farmer education gains momentum.

Way ahead: Training the farmers

Organic farming should begin with training the most important people behind the big picture: the farmers.

- Farmers need to be informed about the latest technological and scientific developments in this area.
- Incorporating organic tools and techniques into their daily operations in an efficient and effective manner will require ongoing training.
- Farmers will need to be weaned off quick-fix chemical methods and reintroduced to our long lost indigenous knowledge. They need to be trained afresh on aspects such as soil building, pest management, inter-cropping, and compost and manure preparation.
- Agronomists must be deployed in the field to monitor the quality of produce and give timely advice to farmers.
- Certification programmes such as the Indian government's National Centre for Organic Farming (NCOF) and Participatory Guarantee Scheme (PGS) need to be made mandatory.

Conclusion:

To make organic farming cost effective and easily accessible, the farmer needs to be brought in, in a way that he sees financial promise and possibilities. With farmers and consumers both benefiting from clean, healthy, non-chemical produce, along with unprecedented gains for the environment, organic farming could put Indian agriculture in a win-win situation.

Connecting the dots:

- To make organic farming cost effective and easily accessible, the farmer needs to be brought in, in a way that he sees financial promise and possibilities. Discuss.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 1

• Social Issues

General Studies 2

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

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018: An analysis

Introduction:

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 introduces the death penalty for rape of children younger than 12 years. This article discusses how the law betrays a lack of thought on the likely impact and can endanger the lives of future victims.

Issues:

Adding burden to the existing dysfunctional system:

- Reports on the functioning of special courts under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 have demonstrated that one of the main causes for the low rate of conviction under the Act is the lack of infrastructure and manpower in the criminal justice system.
- Investigations are regularly inefficient given an understaffed, poorly trained, overburdened police force which has little to no forensic support and is often sympathetic towards the accused.
- The timelines for completion of the investigation, for recording of evidence, and for completion of trial are never adhered to because functionaries in the system (police, prosecutors and judges) find them impractical given their case load and the facilities they have to work with.

Instead of addressing these issues which prevent the proper implementation of the law, as it exists, on the ground, the ordinance has, instead, added to the burden of a dysfunctional system.

Issues with mandatory minimum sentences:

The POCSO and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (CLAA) changed the sentencing

regime for sexual offences by introducing mandatory minimum sentences, thresholds a judge did not have discretion to breach even if she felt there were mitigating circumstances that warranted it.

- An “anchoring effect” is seen, whereby even if there are aggravating circumstances, judges award only the mandatory minimum sentence.
- Another effect of high mandatory minimum sentences is that judges, in order to avoid awarding what they view to be a disproportionate sentence, prefer to acquit the accused.

Therefore, enhanced mandatory minimum punishments in the ordinance are likely to be counterproductive.

Issue of age determination:

The ordinance has anchored its enhanced mandatory minimum sentences and death penalty on age, without considering the issues that arise with age determination. Given the unavailability or unreliability of age-related documents in most parts of the country, reliance is placed on ossification tests to prove the age of the victim in cases under the POCSO. Since an ossification test cannot pinpoint an exact age operates with a margin of plus/minus two years, a majority of judges add two years to the upper age limit to conclude that the victim is not a minor. The same issue is likely to arise when considering whether the victim was below the age of 16 or 12, especially if the judge does not believe the enhanced sentence (or the death penalty) is warranted.

Putting future victims at risk:

The introduction of the death penalty for the rape of children under the age of 12 is likely to put future victims (and there will be future victims because the death penalty has been shown to be no more a deterrent than a life sentence) at grave risk. Since the punishment for rape and the punishment for murder are now the same, a rapist will have no incentive to spare his victim's life, especially since her testimony would be the most important piece of evidence against him.

What needs to be done instead?

The government needs to invest in *combating the rape culture* that condones and encourages rape — by age-appropriate sex education at all levels, by aggressive advertisement campaigns to increase awareness and stimulate conversations about gender bias, everyday sexism, stereotypes, consent and equality, and by making concerted efforts to change the way society raises its sons and daughters. Also, we as citizens, need to tie these issues to the goals and gains of electoral politics, so that the political parties invest in these long term, and potentially expensive, efforts.

Connecting the dots:

- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 is a step in right direction. Critically analyze.

NATIONAL**TOPIC*****General Studies 3:***

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

Shale gas extraction by fracking: Positive and Negative Impacts**Introduction:**

Shale gas and oil are unconventional natural resources found at 2,500-5,000 m below the earth's surface, as compared to conventional crude oil found at 1,500 m. Because of its benefits, shale gas is being perceived by some as a 'saviour' of humanity.

Process**of****extraction:**

The process of extracting shale oil and gas requires deep vertical drilling followed by horizontal drilling.

The most common way to extract shale gas is '*hydraulic fracturing*' (*fracking*), where high volumes of water mixed with certain chemicals are pushed down to break the rocks and release the trapped energy minerals.

Fracking seems an attractive tool, both politically and economically.

Government**policy:**

To gain the benefits associated with shale gas, the government introduced a policy on shale gas and oil in 2013, permitting national oil companies to engage in fracking. Under the first phase, shale gas blocks were identified in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu.

Concern:

The environmental groups have strongly criticised the policy, as per them fracking will have adverse environmental impacts.

Countries like Germany and France and subnational governments like Scotland have banned fracking.

Positive

impacts:

Fracking is bound to have positive economic and political impacts. In the U.S., where shale gas has been commercially exploited for two decades, the prices of fuel and electricity have dropped. Recent negotiations between the Secretary of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and American shale producers to control oil production and prices show that the U.S. has gained significant political advantage. Similarly, if India commercially exploits shale deposits, it could meet its ever-increasing energy demand, decrease oil and gas imports, and improve the balance of payments.

Negative

impacts:

Fracking is bound to have a detrimental impact on local communities and the environment.

- As fracking consumes large amounts of water (average 15,000 m³/well) and relatively larger surface area, it is *bound to impact irrigation and other local requirements*. In the U.S. experience, out of 260 chemical substances, 58 have been identified to pose a risk to human life and environment, eight are carcinogens and 17 are toxic to freshwater organisms.
- As 25-90% of the fluid is not retrieved and cracks in the shaft are possible, there is a *high risk of pollution to nearby underground water*. Instances of groundwater pollution have been reported in the U.S. (Pennsylvania) and Canada.
- Fracking has other impacts such as *increased air emissions* (including greenhouse gases) and *seismic activity*. Environmental impact assessments of the European Union and the U.K. have recognised these risks.

Legal hurdles:

- The Supreme Court of India has ruled that every person has the right to enjoy pollution-free water and air. It is also an established principle that the state holds its natural resources in trust for the benefit of the people, and has the duty to protect these resources from harm. If the risk from fracking to underground water materialises, courts can hold the state responsible for it, stop the activity, and order other corrective and preventive measures.
- The Model Bill for the Conservation, Protection, Regulation and Management of Groundwater, 2016, sets a priority for use of groundwater — right to water for life, and water to achieve “food security, supporting sustenance agriculture, sustainable livelihoods

and eco-system needs". Only after satisfying these priorities can underground water be used for other purposes.

Conclusion:

In the light of the risks involved, the government should impose a temporary on fracking. And proceed only when a system to mitigate the negative impacts is in place.

Connecting the dots:

- Explain the process of extraction of shale gas. Outline the positive and negative impacts of fracking. Given the negative impacts, the process may have and the legal hurdles, the government should take calibrated steps. Discuss.

NATIONAL

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

Panchayati Raj System: What remains to be done after 25 years?

Background:

Panchayati Raj in the country received the president's assent and was proclaimed as incorporated in Parts IX and IXA of the Constitution 25 years ago. There is much that remains to be done.

Positive developments:

- All states have ensured the full and conscientious implementation of the mandatory provisions of the Constitution on local self-government institutions in both rural and urban India.
- Most state legislation has rendered statutory several of the recommendatory provisions of the Constitution such as the 29 and 18 subjects for devolution illustratively set out respectively in the 12th and 13th Schedules.

- Successive (central) Finance Commissions have so substantially increased funding to the local bodies, and progressively converted this into untied grants, that panchayats are flush with funds. If recommendation made by chairman NK Singh of the current 15th Finance Commission to increase current funding by about 2 per cent of the divisible pool, is implemented, we would be achieving standards of international best practice in respect of financing local bodies.

The roots of grassroots democracy in the country have been embedded deep:

- Today, we have in our 2.5 lakh panchayats and municipalities some 32 lakh elected people's representatives.
- Uniquely, SC/ST representation is proportional to SC/ST population ratios in villages, talukas/blocks and districts respectively. Approximately one lakh sarpanches are SC/ST.
- Most staggering of all is the representation of women: Comprising about 14 lakh members, with some 86,000 chairing their local bodies, there are more elected women representatives (mostly from economically weaker and socially disadvantaged sections) in India alone than in the rest of the world put together!

What remains?

- **Effective devolution:**
The 2013 expert committee laid out in detail how to achieve this through the device of *"activity mapping"*. Activity Mapping involves clear cut delineation of functions for each level of the local governance. It does not imply that the subjects are devolved wholesale. The Subjects or Sectors need to be unbundled and assigned to the different levels of Government on the basis of clear principles of public finance and public accountability, and, the governance principles of Subsidiarity, democratic decentralization and Citizen centricity. The result of good Activity Mapping would be to clearly identify where competence, authority and accountability lie. Giving the Gram Panchayats the responsibilities of asset creation, operation, and maintenance, while involving it in the planning process through the Gram Sabha; giving the middle tiers responsibilities for human capital development; and giving higher levels of government the responsibility of policy, standards and monitoring of outcomes.
- Activity maps should be incorporated in the guidelines of all centrally sponsored schemes. The massive amounts of money earmarked for poverty alleviation should be sent directly to gram panchayat accounts, reinforced by detailed activity maps to ensure genuine "local self-government".

- **Financial incentivisation of the states** to encourage effective devolution to the panchayats of the three Fs — functions, finances, functionaries.
- **District planning based on grassroots inputs** received from the village, intermediate and district levels through people's participation in the gram and ward sabhas.
- Following the example of Karnataka, to establish a **separate cadre of panchayat officials** who would be subordinate to the elected authority especially in states with weak panchayat systems.

Conclusion:

These above outlined steps might constitute a useful beginning for second-generation reforms to secure grassroots development through democratic grassroots governance. It has taken a generation to get to where we have and we need perhaps another generation to achieve with satisfaction the evolution in grassroots governance and development.

Connecting the dots:

- Panchayati raj system in India requires second-generation reforms to secure grassroots development through democratic grassroots governance. Comment.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

Increasing female participation in national politics

Background:

For a country with a female population that is larger than that of the United States and a thriving democracy that prides itself on being robust and responsive, India has done rather poorly when it comes to female representation in national politics. The 16th Lok Sabha has only 64 women among its 542 members, a mere 11.8 per cent. Afghanistan (27.7 per cent), Pakistan (20.6 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (19.9 per cent) do better.

Need to increase female participation in national politics:

As representatives, we need women-

- To eliminate the systemic biases and structural barriers that keep girls out of the tech industry, victims of gender-based violence in fear and women's sports teams under-funded. To dismantle structural barriers, the responsibility falls on working women who have successfully overcome constraints to open the gates for other women.
- To design laws that encourage better education for girls. To secure financial independence and formal employment for women. To push up our abysmal female labour force participation rates. To ensure that female hygiene products are not taxed as luxury goods.
- Watching women in leadership positions reduces the negative perceptions men have about their effectiveness as leaders. It also induces men to dream better dreams for their daughters, and that is no mean feat.

More creative and competitive women needed in politics:

PRS research highlights that the share of lawyers in Parliament at the moment is a mere 7 per cent, relative to the 36 per cent in the very first legislature after Independence. Today, the largest single occupation represented in Parliament is agriculture (27 per cent), followed by political and social service (24 per cent). As India makes laws that determine what our technology, public safety, economy, and foreign policy will look like in the coming years, we need more of these professional skills in our legislative bodies. We need more lawyers, medical practitioners (currently 4 per cent), teachers (4 per cent), civil, police, and military service personnel (2 per cent), and journalists (less than 1 per cent) to use their knowledge and expertise to shape legislation, anticipating the challenges of tomorrow.

Over the past few decades, women have made their mark as effective managers, bankers, professors, corporate leaders, lawyers, doctors and civil servants. These are women who know how to solve problems, get things done and manage multiple responsibilities. *Electing able women professionals will help us simultaneously achieve better representation and expertise.*

Challenges:

- Quotas at national level:
The government has instituted quotas for women political candidates at the local level — 33 per cent of seats are reserved for them. These quotas have been successful. Yet, there is resistance to implementing them at the national level. Critics allege that these quotas are neither meritocratic nor useful because women in politics are simply representatives of the men who would have been in politics — wives and daughters of male proxies. The quotas at the local level have improved the quality of local policymaking, as women

have tended to invest significantly more than their male counterparts on the provision of public goods — health, education, and roads.

- Professional women can voluntarily run for office and overcome criticism about women being male proxies and that quotas negatively affect meritocracy. But, entering politics voluntarily, without a political background, is not easy. The financial, social and cultural barriers to entry are higher for women. There is more criticism and less support.

Voters subject women candidates to higher standards than male candidates.

Conclusion:

Making the decision to run for office requires planning. It requires overcoming financial barriers, and it needs supportive partners and families. But once these challenges are overcome the women in politics would give the younger generations the opportunity to grow up in a more inclusive country, a country that makes better decisions for all.

Connecting the dots:

- Women in India especially the working women should enter politics as it will not only provide better representation at national level but also bring expertise. Comment.

NATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

- *Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources*
- *Issues relating to poverty and hunger*

Saving the newborns' lives in India

In

news:

In February, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) released a report highlighting the grim state of the Indian health system for newborns. With an average newborn mortality rate of 25.4 deaths for every 1,000 live births, India leads the list of lower middle-income countries with the highest number of newborn deaths—a staggering 6.4 million per year, or about a quarter of the world's total.

Although India is undeniably on a path toward economic prosperity, losing millions of children every year to preventable deaths undermines this progress.

Reasons behind newborns death:

- With the inclusion of vaccines against diarrhoea and pneumonia in the national immunization programme, India was able to reduce the under-five mortality rate by 34% between 1990 and 2006. However, because causes of newborn deaths are different, immunization programmes are unable to prevent these deaths.
- Some 80% of newborn deaths result from complications from labour and delivery: premature birth, low-birth weight, neonatal infections, and birth trauma. Out of these, infections such as pneumonia and diarrhoeal diseases, account for half of all newborn deaths.

Instead of asking for more resources we need to improve the capacity of the existing health system.

Improving the capacity of existing health system:

- **Simple interventions around the time of birth:**
Such as hand washing, cleaning the umbilical cord with a regular antiseptic, ensuring the newborn is warm, dry, and fed—are affordable and more effective than previously thought and can reduce newborn death rates in low-resource settings. Most of these strategies do not require a specialist.
- **Task sharing approach:**
It refers to strengthening of the capacity of the health system by distributing essential responsibilities among a larger group of health workers and emphasizing shared responsibility for high-quality outcomes. For instance, in obstetric care of a newborn, a trained birth attendant or midwife can handle routine cases, freeing up an experienced surgeon or obstetrician to handle complications.

Case

study:

Recent evidence from Karnataka revealed that WHO birth attendant training in Essential Newborn Care reduced perinatal mortality to 36 per 1,000 live births, from 52. Stillbirth rates decreased by about 40%, to 14 per 1,000 live births, and early neonatal death fell by about one-fourth to 22 per 1,000 live births.

- **Better training of midwives:**
About 70% of the Indian population currently resides in rural areas. Midwives already play a crucial role in delivering obstetrical care in these areas. Most midwives, however, have never been trained in practices of infection control or umbilical cord care.

Strengthening midwifery practices through education, training, and regulation in low- and middle-income countries can result in more efficient utilization of resources and improved outcomes for both pregnant mothers and newborn children.

The above mentioned low-cost and high-impact interventions can save millions of lives. Medical and nursing professional societies can play a critical role in the solution.

Conclusion:

We must empower and train healthcare providers who work in remote communities and serve populations that are unable to access safe and affordable obstetric care in the current health system. Losing almost a million lives every year to preventable causes is a travesty of sound health policy. The cost of inaction is too high.

Connecting the dots:

- A Unicef report released recently highlighted the grim state of the Indian health system for newborns. The issue is more about poor capacity of existing healthcare system and less about lack of resources. Analyze.

NATIONAL

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.*
- *Inter-State Water Dispute*

Inter-State frictions: Rejuvenating the Inter-State Council

Background:

A federal feud that has broken out over how taxes are to be shared between different states. This highlights the stark problem—*India does not have adequate institutions to manage conflicts between states.*

The southern states have been complaining that the terms of reference of the Fifteenth Finance

Commission are, in effect, punishment for their better economic performance. The government thus needs to breathe life into the moribund Inter-State Council.

The Inter-State Council:

- It is a constitutional body that has representatives of the Union government as well as chief ministers of states.
- The council is chaired by the prime minister, and it also has a few Union ministers as permanent invitees.
- The Inter-State Council was set up in 1990 following the recommendations of the **Sarkaria Commission**. The constitutional roots of the council are to be found in **Article 263**, which recommends that the President of India set up such a council to deal with federal issues.

Reasons the Constitution gives for setting up the institution are:

- It will be useful when it comes to “inquiring into and advising upon disputes which may have arisen between states”.
- To discuss subjects for which the components of the Indian union have common interests.
- To figure out how to coordinate policy.

Issue:

Most of the institutional architecture of Indian federalism is focused on relations between the Union government and the states. Even Articles 258 and 258A, which made their entry into the Constitution after the Seventh Amendment in 1957, can be seen as an attempt to provide space for state governments to legislate in areas that are usually the territory of the union, and vice versa. There is *far less institutional space to settle inter-state frictions*, especially since the Rajya Sabha is no longer treated as a council of states but as a parking lot for unelectable leaders of political parties.

Regional divergence could lead to further inter-state tensions—and matters could get worse once the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies is unfrozen in 2026.

Rejuvenating the Inter-State Council:

A rejuvenated Inter-State Council will have an important role to play in the coming years, especially since its members are the political leaders of their respective states.

- The council is now just a discussion group, but it should have a greater say in federal coordination in the future.
- The GST council has an innovative voting structure, with the Union government having a third of the vote while the states share the rest equally, irrespective of the size of their population or economy.

This is one option for a more empowered Inter-State Council.

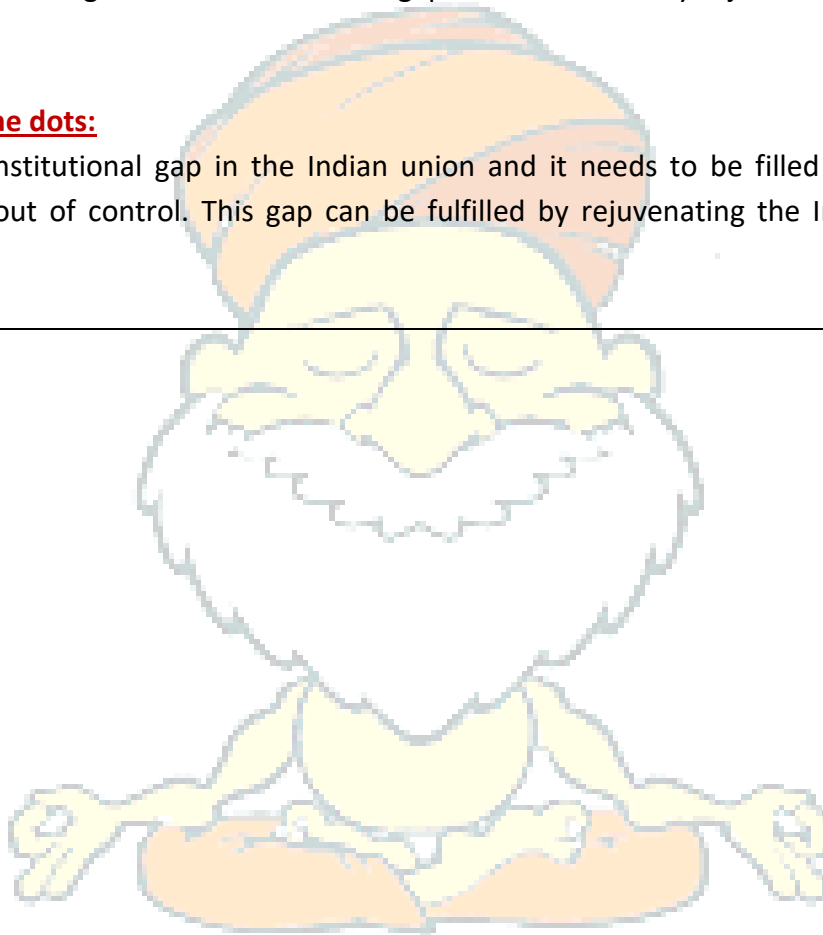
- If the Inter-State Council is to emerge as the key institution to manage inter-state frictions, it first needs to have a regular meeting schedule.
- The council also has to have a permanent secretariat which will ensure that the periodic meetings are more fruitful.

Conclusion:

There is an institutional gap in the Indian union right now—and it needs to be filled before inter-state frictions get out of control. This gap can be fulfilled by rejuvenating the Inter-State Council.

Connecting the dots:

There is an institutional gap in the Indian union and it needs to be filled before inter-state frictions get out of control. This gap can be fulfilled by rejuvenating the Inter-State Council. Discuss.



INTERNATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

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 and Pakistan ties: Improving channels of communication

Background:

Recently India and Pakistan have not fired at each other across the border in Jammu and Kashmir barring one exception, a welcome calm after several weeks of incessant ceasefire violations.

Poor handling of diplomats:

- Disagreements and spats stemming from these issues, in the generally tense atmosphere of ceasefire violations and the resultant political rhetoric, have led to highly undesirable acts of harassing diplomatic personnel who are protected under the 1961 Vienna Convention.
- Aggressive surveillance of each other's diplomatic personnel is nothing new in the India-Pakistan context.

Unless the two governments are willing to discuss and resolve the triggers that have in past and in recent times too led to a series of incidents of harassment of diplomatic personnel, we may see a repeat of such incidents. Harassment of High Commission personnel requires critical attention because maintenance of diplomatic courtesies is not just a matter of instrumentality and convenience, but also represents the civility of the host state and its people.

Dealing with spies:

- We must admit and acknowledge that first, our countries spy. Espionage is very much part of statecraft that all modern states engage in, as do India and Pakistan.
- Those engaged in espionage should be expelled rather than tortured or killed.

India and Pakistan should also, therefore, look at the issue of espionage as part of essential statecraft and deal with spies in a professional and humane manner.

Enhancing and improving communication:

The state of communication between India and Pakistan is at its lowest ebb in more than a decade:

- The Directors-General of Military Operations (DGMOs) have not considered it appropriate to meet despite constant firing across the J&K border.
- Contacts between the respective High Commissions and the host governments have been reduced to 'demarches', 'summons', 'notes verbale' and stern warnings.
- High-level political contacts, such as the visit of Pakistan's Commerce Minister Pervaiz Malik to India, have been called off.

Given that the year ahead is critical for India and Pakistan and the bilateral relationship, the focus should be on enhancing and improving communication.

Conclusion:

Recent statements by Pakistan's army chief suggests that there is a desire on the part of the Pakistan army to normalise relations with India. The decision-makers in New Delhi should capitalise on this. Pakistan should also initiate tough action against anti-India terrorist groups based in Pakistan. The channels of communication should begin to open up and the two sides must build on it.

Connecting the dots:

- It is time India and Pakistan normalise relations with India keeping the communication channel open and Pakistan taking actions against anti-India terrorist groups based in Pakistan. Comment.

INTERNATIONAL**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*

US-North Korea Summit?**Introduction:**

U.S. President Donald Trump and the North Korean Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-un are planning

a summit in May which according to Mr. Trump could lead to “the greatest deal in the world”. This will be the first summit meeting between the U.S. and North Korea. Korea, caught between China, Japan, Russia and America, the Korean Peninsula has been a plaything of the great powers. But since the beginning of this year, the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and the South Korean president Moon Jae- have repeatedly surprised the world with their diplomacy across the divided peninsula.

Recent timeline:

- Since 2011 when Mr. Kim took over, North Korea has conducted four nuclear tests; the first two were conducted in 2006 and 2009. The sixth test, last September, had a yield more than six times the Hiroshima bomb.
- In his New Year address, Mr. Kim conveyed two messages — that the entire U.S. was within range and the nuclear button was on his table, and that he was open to dialogue with Seoul.
- South Korea responded positively and reaffirmed willingness to talk with North Korea at any time and anywhere. In early March, a South Korean delegation visited Pyongyang to explore the idea of talks.

China and North Korea:

- China has long been North Korea’s political ally and economic lifeline, accounting for 90% of North Korea’s foreign trade. It has often resisted tightening of sanctions that could lead to the collapse of the regime.
- Relations between the two countries have soured since 2013. Missile tests when China was hosting the G20 summit in 2016 and the Belt and Road Forum in 2017 together with a nuclear test during the BRICS summit in 2017 were embarrassments for China. As sanctions tightened under successive UN Security Council resolutions, North Korea blamed China for ‘dancing to the tune’ of the U.S.

However, Mr. Kim realises that he needs help to handle U.S. pressure. His China visit acknowledges Mr. Xi’s extension in power beyond 2022; and for China, it reflects its pivotal role in any negotiations regarding North Korea.

Reconciling objectives:

Mr. Kim’s objectives are clear — securing regime legitimacy, regime security and sanctions relief. A summit with Mr. Trump provides legitimacy as long as it begins a dialogue process leading towards diplomatic recognition.

Way ahead:

- Having achieved a certain threshold in its nuclear and missile capabilities, North Korea can afford a pause in testing in return for sanctions relief.
- For 'denuclearisation' to happen, a long-drawn process involving discussions regarding the U.S. nuclear umbrella for South Korea will be required.
- South Korea would like to ensure that it has a veto over U.S. decisions regarding North Korea and gaining operational control over its own military forces, both of which will require protracted negotiations.
- North Korea's aggressive testing provided justification for the deployment of the THAAD missile defence system aggravating Chinese concerns. China would prefer lowering tensions though it is in no hurry to see Korean unification.

Indian context:

- India should stop being a passive observer of the Korean geopolitical theatre. While Delhi is in no position to influence the outcomes in the current diplomacy, a more active engagement with the leadership of the two Koreas would better prepare India for potential historic changes in the region.
- The importance of effective neighbourhood diplomacy- Kim and Moon have shown that relaxation of tensions between North and South can give both of them a greater say in regional affairs. If it makes creative moves in the neighbourhood, Delhi could find it a bit easier to cope with the penetration of rival powers into the Subcontinent.

Conclusion:

Major compromises will be needed for reconciling interests of all the key players for the high stakes summitry on the Korean peninsula to succeed. The success as of now hinges on multiple factors.

Connecting the dots:

- The recent developments in Korean peninsula is a welcome change. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL

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*

China-India-Pakistan-Bangladesh axis: A game changer for South Asia

Background:

At the heart of South Asia's poor integration is India-Pakistan rivalry, complicated by China-Pakistan proximity and India-China hostility. A new dimension has been added with souring of Pakistan-Bangladesh relations and the India-China tug of war over Bangladesh. Time has come to make a paradigm shift in South Asia's regional integration strategy.

Caught in a tangle:

Today the big three of South Asia (IPB) are caught up in a complex web, both within and beyond the region. The remaining five — i.e. Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan — are paying the price of regional disintegration caused by unresolved puzzles having roots in the China-IPB (CIPB) axis. If the big three can have a strategic partnership that also factors in China, the remaining five can effortlessly fit into positive regionalism with a win-win situation for all.

India-Pakistan-Bangladesh:

- IPB account for approximately 95% of South Asia's GDP and population.
- Along with China, they account for 18.5% of global GDP and 41% of global population.

Intra-regional trade:

Far below potential:

- South Asia's intra-regional trade, currently 5% of total trade, can grow to \$80 billion from the current \$28 billion, the lion's share being within IPB.
- Pakistan and India have potential trade capacity of \$20 billion compared to the current \$3 billion.
- Underdeveloped transport and logistics services and bureaucratic procedures are deterring India-Bangladesh cross border trade, which can grow by 300%.

Accelerating inward investments:

Although the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is being developed as a bilateral initiative, if Indian sensitivities can be addressed, it can be a multilateral project, integrating India as well as other South Asian and Central Asian regions. China has already pledged \$38 billion to Bangladesh under the BRI.

Synergetic integration of the economic corridors with other BRI projects can accelerate inward investment into IPB.

Connectivity:

Issue:

- Due to cross-border barriers and lack of transport facilitation among IPB, freight movement is taking place along expensive routes, escalating investment cost.
- Movement of trucks across the international frontier is confined by absence of cross-border agreements between India and Bangladesh and India and Pakistan.
- Rail connectivity is restricted due to technical problems of different gauges, track structures, signalling and so forth. Absence of a multilateral agreement has restricted the realisation of the railway potential.

Way ahead:

- The deep-pocketed Chinese can invest in land and rail infrastructure to develop both inter-regional connectivity and intra-regional connectivity.
- Although India and Bangladesh have started exploring opportunities using Ashuganj inland port, regional inland waterways must be explored.
- China can lead in transport and transit agreements to facilitate smooth movement of freight and passenger vehicles across IPB resulting in integration with China and also South Asia.

Meeting the energy potential:

The supply-demand gap of power in IPB is estimated to be 18,707 MW.

- To unravel the full potential, energy treaties based on renewable sources have become imperative.
- With greater electricity generation and utilisation of domestic energy endowments, combined efforts of BCIM, CPEC and the proposed China-Nepal-India (CNI) Economic Corridor under BRI, can capitalise on regional energy potential.

Meeting the water demand:

By 2050, China, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will experience water shortages.

Issue:

- The three largest trans-boundary river basins, Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra, are all within CIPB. This represents a huge potential for water-sharing and hydro power projects across the basins, but political mistrust is an impediment.
- While there exist bilateral river-water sharing treaties between India and Pakistan as well as India and Bangladesh, China is absent except for a hydrological data-sharing collaboration.

- China has expressed interest to pursue water- sharing treaties and the other three affected can come together in a collaborative framework. This can boost the livelihoods of millions across the region.

Promoting tourism:

Issues:

- IPB fail to attract sufficient tourists due to poor civil aviation connectivity, complex regulations and lack of visa liberalisation procedures.
- Of China's total outbound tourists, only 1% are to IPB.
- Inadequate, expensive and mediocre travelling facilities against the backdrop of pickpockets, burglary, and sexual assaults have resulted in tourists lacking interest in the region.

If these issues are resolved, it would enhance mobility of both tourists and students.

Conclusion:

A strategic collaboration between CIPB that rises to the occasion, looking beyond historical animosity and misgivings, can unlock a new era of regionalism whose benefits far outweigh negatives.

Connecting the dots:

- Today the big three of South Asia (India-Pakistan-Bangladesh) are caught up in a complex web, both within and beyond the region. Time has come to make a paradigm shift in South Asia's regional integration strategy. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL

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*

Normalising India-Nepal relations

Background:

The current state of India's relations with Nepal is unhealthy. Standing up against India has unfortunately become an important part of Nepal's definition of sovereignty. Delhi must try and understand the sources of this negative tradition and address the problem purposefully.

Issue:

Delhi inherited from the Raj, the sense of paramountcy over the Subcontinent. And Delhi has refused to adapt to the new circumstances. If the Raj's hegemony was based on a partnership with friendly feudals, Delhi was torn between aligning with the monarchies and responding to the democratic aspirations of the people in the peripheral states. One way or another, India was inevitably sucked into the internal affairs of its neighbors, including Nepal. The most recent case was India's involvement in Nepal's constitution-making.

Way

ahead:

Nepal PM Oli's visit this week provides a major opportunity for Delhi to put the relationship with Nepal back on a new set of rails. As in India-US ties, the initiative to reduce suspicion and generate political comfort must come from the larger nation, which is India in case of India-Nepal.

Three broad imperatives stand out for Delhi.

- India should acknowledge Nepal's sovereignty and promise to conduct relations on that basis. Delhi needs to shift from underlining "the special relationship" with Nepal to one based on "sovereign equality". This would mean that India should stop meddling in Nepal's internal affairs and focus more on the state-to-state relationship. Also, it is in India's interest to have a strong and sovereign Nepal on its northern frontiers.
- Instead of demanding an "India first policy" from Oli, Prime Minister the government must affirm that India's strong support for a "Nepal first" policy. Situated between the world's two fastest growing economies, Nepal has every reason to benefit from its location.
- While the Indian security establishment has long claimed a special political relationship, Delhi's economic policies have prevented the full development of the natural economic complementarity between the two countries. The rotting trade infrastructure on the long and open border, Delhi's cumbersome procedures for administering economic assistance and the inability to implement infrastructure projects in reasonable time, have all added to India's woes in Nepal.

Conclusion:

The two sides must focus on the already committed projects and the ones that promise early returns to the people on both sides of the border. An emphasis on projects relating to cross-border trade, transport and tourism could be the beginning of a solid economic foundation for a sustainable political partnership with sovereign Nepal.

Connecting the dots:

- The current state of India's relations with Nepal is unhealthy. The initiative to reduce suspicion and generate political comfort must come from the larger nation, which is India in this case. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL**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*

Strengthening India-US Economic Partnership: Advancing prosperity**Introduction:**

Despite vastly different levels of economic development, India and the US increasingly face a number of similar economic challenges. Both countries need to rapidly create new jobs, move people into the middle class and keep them there, and take advantage of the opportunities that globalization can bring while mitigating its challenges to sustainable domestic growth and strong and equitable democratic societies.

Tackling challenges require effective domestic economic policies that address not just interest rates and investment, but also healthcare and education. International economic partnerships will be a key part of the solution as well, and, working together, the US and India can advance shared prosperity.

The US-India economic relationship:
It has a strong foundation.
Bilateral trade has more than doubled since 2006, reaching \$115 billion in 2016.

By leveraging the ties that already exist, and through a coordinated strategy of investment and innovation, a smart US-India economic partnership can help each country improve the condition of its people.

Boosting economic growth by strengthening partnership:

Three areas of bilateral cooperation in particular can boost economic growth that reaches all sectors of society in both countries.

- The two countries must invest in infrastructure. India needs to invest \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years to meet its infrastructure needs. The US department of treasury has been providing technical assistance to help the Pune municipal corporation issue municipal bonds. By expanding this programme, more cities around India could fund their infrastructure needs. Similarly, large institutional investors, such as US public pension funds, have been increasingly focused on investing in global infrastructure since they need a diversity of quality investment options to help them meet the retirement security needs of their beneficiaries, who include public school teachers, firefighters, and police officers. In order to link up investors with ripe investment opportunities, both countries should hold institutional investor summits to facilitate private sector investment in each other's infrastructure. This focus can boost long-term economic growth and job creation in both countries.
- Both countries must develop new and innovative ways to contend with the changing landscape of employment. As the nature of work changes, creating jobs requires innovation in addition to investment. India and the US are home to tremendous human capital and research and development capabilities, and the two countries should bring these together in policy forums and research centres. By holding a bilateral dialogue focused on the future of work, policymakers, entrepreneurs, technology experts, and community leaders can address employment trends and community needs to refine policy solutions that leverage the changing nature of work to create stable, well-paying jobs and empower citizens.
- Subnational cooperation is critical to economic growth in the two large, diverse federal democracies, where states and cities will be key actors as they craft solutions that meet their regions' unique needs. Large states and cities should create their own offices of international affairs, and work with the foreign ministries to connect one another with technical training, capacity building, and best practices. This can also advance the existing cooperation on smart cities. The US government is currently providing technical assistance for three Indian cities—

Ajmer, Allahabad, Visakhapatnam—identified by India for building modern infrastructure and renewable energy capacity.

Conclusion:

A vibrant democracy functions best when all its citizens are empowered. Without jobs that benefit all segments of society, neither country will be able to support sustainable growth, and the backlash against trade will grow, harming economic opportunities and the openness of both societies.

India and the US are often described as indispensable democratic partners. Delivering on the economic opportunity could play a major role in realizing the potential of this partnership.

Connecting the dots:

- India and the US are often described as indispensable democratic partners. Strengthening the economic partnership can help advance shared prosperity given similar economics challenges.

INTERNATIONAL

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Reducing differences over BRI

Introduction:

At the annual Boao forum in Hainan this week, Chinese leader Xi Jinping is expected to present himself as the new champion of globalisation and castigate the unilateral economic actions of US President Donald Trump. While demonstrating his readiness to confront Trump measure for measure on trade, Xi is likely to signal some flexibility on key issues raised by the US. US has raised various concerns regarding Chinese trade. These include concerns over-restrictive approaches to trade and investment, limited market access, and theft of intellectual property. Earlier this year, Premier Li Keqiang had promised that China will open its door wider to foreign investment as part of Beijing's new phase in economic liberalisation.

Reasons behind skepticism in India:

- Delhi has struggled hard to cope with the massive trade deficit in favour of Beijing. Currently, at nearly \$52 billion, it accounted for nearly 45 per cent of India's total trade deficit last year. Despite Delhi's repeated efforts to seek Chinese cooperation in reducing the trade deficit, it has run into a wall in Beijing.
- Delhi has been deeply troubled by Xi's Belt and Road Initiative. Last May, Delhi refused to attend Xi's Belt and Road Forum, despite considerable persuasion from Beijing. India argued that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of the BRI, violates India's sovereignty in Kashmir. It added that the BRI projects are pushing recipient countries into indebtedness, do not transfer skills or technology and are environmentally unsustainable.

China is planning to extend the CPEC to Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Maldives, Nepal, Myanmar and Sri Lanka are eagerly pursuing potential BRI projects.

Recent Indian advances include:

On its part, Delhi is stepping up its effort to promote connectivity with the neighbours.

- The Chabahar port project in Iran.
- The recent agreement on building a rail link to Kathmandu.
- India is also in discussion with Japan and the US to pool resources and coordinate approaches to sustainable infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific.

Reducing the differences over the BRI:

Both Delhi and Beijing have an incentive to reduce their differences on the BRI and find ways to work together on at least a limited agenda of connectivity.

- As both Delhi and Beijing push for mega trans-border connectivity around the Subcontinent, the viability of the projects would significantly improve if there is cooperation between India and China. Consider the fact that financing for China's hydroelectric projects in Nepal would be lot easier if the power plants are linked to North Indian markets. Similarly, the proposed Indian and Chinese rail lines in Nepal would be more efficient if they are part of sensible trade and transit agreements between Delhi, Kathmandu and Beijing.
- The Subcontinent's geography and the size of India's market make it plain that many BRI projects will be hugely successful if India is part of them.
- Persistent competition and conflict between India and China on regional connectivity would make many projects of both countries less efficient.

On its part, Delhi has said it is open to consultations with China on the development of regional trans-border infrastructure.

Beijing, in turn, has floated a number of new proposals for Delhi's consideration. These include

extension of the CPEC to India, promoting connectivity across the Himalayas in J&K, Nepal, Sikkim and other places.

Conclusion:

India's broader concerns on the BRI can be addressed if Delhi and Beijing move from the abstract discussion of the BRI as a single grand initiative, to specific connectivity projects. In any such negotiation, all dimensions of the project — from fiscal to environmental — should be jointly finalised by Delhi and Beijing.

Connecting the dots:

- Both Delhi and Beijing have an incentive to reduce their differences on the BRI and find ways to work together on at least a limited agenda of connectivity. Discuss.

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India-Nepal relations: Going forward

Introduction:

Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's earlier nine-month tenure as PM in 2015-16 had seen relations with India hit a new low. It thus made eminent sense to begin his second term on a positive note.

Unlike the first tenure, which began on the sour note of the Madhesi agitation against the new constitution, this time he has come to power with convincing election victories. From all accounts, the Nepalese PM's recent visit to India went well but it will take pragmatism and patient nurturing on both sides to restore the trust and confidence.

Contentious years:

- Nepal's political transition began nearly three decades ago when it adopted a new constitution in 1990 which ushered in multiparty democracy. However, stability eluded Nepal with a spreading Maoist insurgency. In the process, the gains of democracy were eroded.

- After a decade-long insurgency, which claimed 15,000 lives, followed by a reconciliation, an interim constitution was introduced and the ground prepared for yet another exercise in constitution drafting.
- This seven-year exercise finally produced a new constitution in 2015. Nepal abolished its 250-year-old monarchy and emerged as a federal republic.
- Last year, 2017, was a year of elections in Nepal. Local body elections were held after a gap of 20 years. This was followed by the elections under the new constitution for the national parliament (the House of Representatives and the National Assembly) and the seven Provincial Assemblies which concluded earlier this year.

A rethink in Delhi:

In New Delhi too, there has been a growing realisation that time had come to make a new beginning with Nepal. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit in August 2014 had marked a new high in relations, but Mr. Oli's nine-month tenure in 2015-16 was marked by acrimonious exchanges.

- India's openly stated reservations on the new constitution in support of the Madhesi cause.
- The economic disruptions caused by the undeclared blockade had fuelled anti-Indianism.
- Last year, Mr. Oli visited Rasuwagadhi on the Nepal-Tibet border and announced that it would be upgraded as a road and rail hub between China and Nepal.

Compared to the Joint Statement issued in August 2014 at the time of Mr. Modi's visit, the latest one is much shorter and talks about strengthening relations on the basis of "equality, mutual trust, respect and benefit".

Issues still not covered in the latest joint statement:

Difficult issues, including-

- A review of the contentious 1950 Treaty.
- Recruitment of Nepali nationals in the Gurkha regiments of the Indian Army.
- Resolving the fallout of the 2016 demonetisation exercise which has left the Nepal Rastra Bank holding a stock of Indian currency.
- Long-pending hydel projects like Pancheshwar.
- Resumption of the SAARC summit process which remains stalled since 2016 after Jaish-e-Mohammed militants attacked the Army base in Uri.
- The need for an inclusive political process.

Do not find any mention.

Yet it is a step forward:

There is a realisation in Delhi that cultural and historical ties between the people in both countries are important but just as for India, globalisation offers new openings to Nepal too.

China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative offers Nepal an option that may end up carrying unacceptable baggage but at least appears attractive at first.

Poor Project implementation:

For decades, India has been Nepal's most significant development partner. Yet the pace of project implementation has been slow, leading to significant time and cost over-runs. To be fair, both India and Nepal share the responsibility for this.

- The idea of four Integrated Check Posts (ICP) on the India-Nepal border to facilitate movement of goods, vehicles and people was mooted 15 years ago and an MOU signed in 2005.

While preparation of surveys and project reports moved slowly on the Indian side, acquisition of land by the Nepali authorities got held up leading to delayed construction. As a result, only the Raxaul-Birgunj ICP has been completed.

- The two Prime Ministers also witnessed the ground breaking ceremony of the Motihari-Amlekhgunj cross-border petroleum products pipeline, a project for which the MOU between the two governments was signed in 2004. It took another three years for the Indian Oil Corporation and the Nepal Oil Corporation to sign the follow-up MOU, eight years to convert it into an agreement and three more to begin the works.
- More examples abound with the hydro-electric sector being the prime example. Nepal's installed hydel capacity is less than 700 MW while it sits on a hydel potential of over 80,000 MW and has to import electricity from India during the lean season. Given that over 60% of the Ganga waters come from Nepal's rivers (Sarda, Ghagar, Rapti, Gandak, Bagmati, Kamala, Kosi and Mechi) and 80% of these flows take place in monsoon months, the imperative for effective water management for both irrigation and power generation is evident, and yet this sector has languished for decades.

Conclusion:

What is now needed is effective delivery on the pending projects, the remaining ICPs, the five railway connections, postal road network in the Terai and the petroleum pipeline so that connectivity is enhanced and the idea of 'inclusive development and prosperity' assumes reality.

Connecting the dots:

- Pragmatism has finally taken root in Delhi and Kathmandu. Project implementation will be the test. Discuss.

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Mending of relations between India and Nepal

Introduction:

After a brief period of turbulent bilateral relations starting September 2015, a U-turn appears to have been effected in India-Nepal relations after the December 2017 elections in Nepal. The U-turn culminated in Prime Minister Oli's three-day official visit to New Delhi starting April 6. The visit is widely rated as most successful and historical.

The current visit of Oli has been characterised as remarkably different.

- Oli was received at the airport by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, who is second in rank in the Modi cabinet.
- Not only was Oli's first foreign visit to India but even his first official meeting as PM took place with Indian business leaders on which occasion he invited Indian investors to Nepal.
- The two leaders held a one-on-one meeting for over one hour at Modi's residence before the delegation level meeting. Such one-on-one meetings rarely happen during visits of high level delegations to India.
- Other than the 12-point regular joint statement, three special statements on agriculture, rail linkages up to Kathmandu, and inland waterways, were issued during the visit.
- For the first time in the last three years, the joint statement did not mention internal issues of Nepal such as amendments to the new constitution, inclusion of minorities, Madhesi, etc.
- Both leaders found synchronization between their favourite development frameworks - 'Sabka Sath Sabka Bikas' and 'Samriddha Nepal Sukhi Nepali'.

Purpose of the visit:

The principal purpose of the visit was to remove the mistrust that had emerged in bilateral relations in the wake of Nepal's adoption of the new constitution and India's reservations about some of its provisions. While addressing Nepal's Parliament before his three-day India visit, Oli said that "the visit is aimed at deepening the relations that have subsisted between Nepal and India since ages."

Mutual feeling to mend relations:**India's course correction: Why?**

- Since India values democracy, PM Modi personally felt that the public mandate in favour of the UML-led left alliance needs to be respected and that India should support institution building in Nepal under a popular government.
- Domestically, the government came under tremendous pressure to improve relations with neighbouring countries and especially with Nepal with which India shares a multi-layered relationship.
- The more than 70 per cent voter turnout and the active participation of Madhesis and Janajatis in Nepal's three level elections – local, provincial and federal – under the new constitution forced India to revisit its earlier position, shed reservations on the constitution and modify policy towards Nepal.

Why did Oli government respond positively?

- The Oli government needed massive developmental assistance to fulfil its poll promises like roads, rural electrification, drinking water, irrigation, jobs, hospitals, industrial zones, railways and airports. Despite China's increasing economic cooperation with Nepal, India continues to remain Nepal's largest trading and business partner. India is the only transit country for Nepal's third country trade despite having signed a transit agreement with China in March 2016.
- Second, the Oli government also realized the requirement for massive funds to implement federalism through the creation of the necessary administrative infrastructure in the provincial capitals.
- Politically, Oli might have felt that rapprochement with India could prevent the formation of a non-UML government in Kathmandu given the slow progress in unification of the two left parties and intra-party factionalism in the UML.

Conclusion:

No doubt, the purposes of the visit have been achieved and a new phase of relationship has begun with India acknowledging Nepal as an 'equal partner'. While the visit has set a new tone in the relationship, it has also brought fresh challenges to the fore in terms of each country addressing the other's concerns. Certainly, the challenges are more for India than they are for Nepal. There is a trust deficit in Nepal because of the Indian reputation for delaying implementation of various projects. This has sent a wrong message in Nepal that the delays are deliberate. After Oli's latest visit, which has created new expectations in Nepal, India needs to seriously address this problem of delivery-lag.

Connecting the dots:

A new tone has been set in the India-Nepal relationship. It has also brought fresh challenges to the fore in terms of each country addressing the other's concerns. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL**TOPIC*****General Studies 2:***

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Substantiating India-US relationship: Need of the hour**Introduction:**

For India, the larger security environment is assuming complex dimensions with a US-China trade-war looming, US-Russia relations taking a nose-dive and China's Belt and Road masterplan unfolding in the Indo-Pacific. Another cause of concern is the emerging Moscow-Beijing axis and Russia's courtship of Pakistan.

Given that nations have neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies, only permanent interests, it is time for India to consider an policy reappraisal.

Evolving bonhomie between India and US:

- A bipartisan consensus in Washington about enlisting India as a strategic partner led to then-President George Bush in 2005 making an offer which New Delhi could not refuse.
- The unprecedented US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, which followed in 2008, accorded India the "de facto" status of a nuclear weapon state without signing the Non Proliferation Treaty.
- Parallel developments followed in the defence arena. The 2004 Agreement on Next Steps in Strategic Partnership was followed by a Defence Framework Agreement in 2005 and the 2012 Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), envisaging the transfer of advanced technologies to India.
- In 2016, India was accorded the status of Major Defence Partner by the US Congress.

Poor progress under the DTTI:

The DTTI has, however, made little actual progress because of divergent objectives. While India seeks technology, the US remains focused on trade. India's defence capability has benefited only from \$15 billion worth of hardware — comprising patrol-aircraft for the navy, transports and helicopters for the IAF, and howitzer guns for the army — purchased under the US Foreign Military Sales (FMS) scheme.

Issue:

A major impediment in the Indo-US defence relationship has been India's reluctance to sign the "foundational agreements" required by the US to enhance defence ties. After discussions assuaging India's justifiable apprehensions about a compromise of strategic autonomy as well as the security of military information, the Logistical Exchange Memorandum of Agreement was signed in 2016. Two others — the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement — haven't been signed yet due to bureaucratic reservations.

A delay in signing these will deprive India of high-tech equipment that should accompany US hardware and prevent the sharing of useful geospatial information between the two militaries.

A word of caution: Our time has not yet come

Indians must beware of hyperbole obscuring reality in the bilateral discourse. American offers of "help to make India a great power" and declarations that India is "not just a regional power, but a global power", should arouse scepticism. Undoubtedly, India is destined to assume its rightful place in the world order but a reality check will tell us that our time has not yet come.

- The vision of a "Super India", offered by the promise of its growing economy, illusory "demographic dividend" and a nuclear arsenal, is gradually receding in the face of harsh domestic realities.
- On the other hand, China, with five times India's GDP, is surging ahead to attain economic, military and technological parity with the US.
- Aiming to be Asia's sole hegemon, China has armed Pakistan and enlisted it as a surrogate, thereby containing India within a South Asian "box".

For India to attain its full economic and strategic potential, it will need an insurance against hegemony.

The choices before India are few and a partnership with the US appears a pragmatic and realist option at this juncture.

Way ahead:

- The DTTI must serve to bolster design and production capabilities in defence. Instead of pursuing symbolism, the DTTI should facilitate a transfer of technologies that have eluded our engineers and scientists.
- In order to elevate the Indo-US relationship to a strategic level and resolve many outstanding bilateral issues, Trump and Modi had agreed to establish a “2+2” dialogue between the respective defence and foreign ministers. As and when the “2+2” dialogue does take place, the Indian side should remind their US interlocutors that in the past three decades the USSR and Russia have, amongst other items, leased two nuclear submarines, sold an aircraft-carrier, and transferred technology for a supersonic cruise missile to India. So, if the US is to deliver on tall promises, some serious re-thinking may be required.

Connecting the dots:

- For India to attain its full economic and strategic potential, it will need an insurance against hegemony from China. The choices before India are few and a partnership with the US appears a pragmatic and realist option at this juncture. Comment.

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Boosting bi-lateral trade between India and Azerbaijan

In

news:

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj recently visited Azerbaijan, in the backdrop of the mid-term ministerial meeting of the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) countries, had been a long-pending one.

Importance:

- Strategically located.
- \$170-billion economy with substantial oil reserves

Low on diplomacy index:
The country ranks low on our diplomacy index. Though the period 2000-2010 saw a few senior ministers reach out through various delegations and platforms, Azerbaijan never really figured even in the second orbit of India's foreign policy outreach.

Bilateral trade between India and Azerbaijan:
It has shot up almost 10-fold from 2005 to 2017 (from about \$50 million to close to half a billion dollars in 2017). This jump in bilateral trade coincided with the opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline to the Mediterranean port in 2007, from where Indian oil companies have been buying substantive quantities of crude oil (ONGC Videsh is an investor in BTC). Naturally, the bilateral trade between the two countries has largely been hydrocarbon-centred, with India being a minor exporter of only few products.

Bilateral trade: Potential to grow

- Logistical complexity between India and Azerbaijan has been a key issue that led to the *setting up of a trade foundation* and the exploring of synergies between the two nations.
- The North South Transport Corridor (NSTC), amongst others, will go a long way in removing the fundamental logistical problems facing both the nations. The NSTC is a multi-modal network of ship, rail, and road routes for moving freight between India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia. The objective of the corridor is to increase trade connectivity between major cities such as Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, and Baku. Once complete, the route is set to drastically reduce transport time between India and Azerbaijan. The route bypasses the Suez Canal and will ensure Indian products reach St. Petersburg in Russia in just 14 days. At present, this is a 42-day journey, skirting North Africa and Europe.

Going forward:

- Once the Iran-Azerbaijan leg of the NSTC is completed, Indian ports can be linked with Azerbaijan via Iran (Chabahar Port), providing a smoother logistics experience for suppliers at far lesser costs. A study says that the new route will reduce distance and costs by 40 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.
- Three sectors that have substantial potential for bi-lateral trade are food processing, pharma and technology.

- As Azerbaijan looks to diversify and reduce its dependence on hydrocarbons, India can play a very enabling role in partnering it for the same.

Connecting the dots:

- The bilateral trade between India and Azerbaijan is set to grow. Discuss.

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Reset of India's neighborhood policy

Introduction:

The government's foreign policy moves over the past few months represent a profound shift in its thinking about the neighborhood.

On the mend:

The "reset" with China:

The trigger for the rapprochement between the two neighbours was the peaceful resolution of the Doklam standoff and Mr. Modi's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Xiamen last year.

- To begin with, the government has taken care not to respond with any heat to reports of the Chinese build-up at Doklam. Keeping its responses cool, New Delhi has been repeating that the Doklam standoff point is untouched and Chinese construction on their side of the boundary is "not a threat" to India.
- The government has also gone to some lengths to tone down planned celebrations marking the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's arrival from Tibet.
- New Delhi and Beijing have now embarked on a flurry of high-level visits that are meant to lead up to a summit meeting between the two leaders; they may even meet more than once.

The shift has given rise to speculation that the two sides are intent on making significant progress in smoothening ties on outstanding issues such as boundary negotiations and also narrowing the trade deficit.

In South Asian region:

This flexibility is also mirrored in the government's dealings in the South Asian region.

With Maldives:

- Despite several appeals by the Maldivian opposition, and nudges from the U.S., the Modi government decided not to exert hard power in bringing Maldives President Abdulla Yameen around after he declared a state of emergency in the country.
- Nor did it engage China in a confrontation when Mr. Yameen sought Beijing's support in this regard.
- The government remained silent as Male went a step further and held discussions with Pakistan's Army Chief, Gen. on joint patrolling of its Exclusive Economic Zone, an area of operation in the Indian Ocean considered to be India's domain.

With Nepal:

- Instead of seeing red when Prime Minister K.P. Oli made it clear that he would step up engagement with China in infrastructure development, India rolled out the red carpet for him earlier this month.
- Nor did India raise concern over Nepal's Constitution which had sparked the confrontation between India and Nepal in 2015-16.

Bhutan

and

Bangladesh:

There has also been outreach to Bhutan and Bangladesh in recent weeks. Both Bhutan and Bangladesh are to hold elections this year, and with incumbent governments more favourably disposed to New Delhi than their challengers in the opposition, the results will have an impact on India's influence in these countries as well.

Quiet progress with Pakistan:

- This year, the government admitted in Parliament for the first time that National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval had met his Pakistani counterpart, as a part of "established channels of communications at various levels" between the two sides in the past few years, post-Pathankot.
- Meanwhile, the resolution of the standoff over the treatment of diplomats in Delhi and Islamabad indicates that neither government has the appetite for escalation at this point.

The next steps:

Overall it seems that India's hard power strategy in the region is being replaced with a more conciliatory one.

However, the next steps will be defined not by a quiet or defensive approach to redefining India's foreign policy in the region, but with a more bold and proactive one.

- The reset with China will work only if there are transactional dividends for both New Delhi and Beijing. Two issues on which both governments can show flexibility are China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's bid for Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership.
- On the NSG, China could remove its block to India's membership by adopting a more inclusive approach within the nuclear export control organisation. The goodwill from such a move would propel India-China relations forward.

On the BRI, if there is political will on both sides, they needn't look too far for creative solutions around India's three concerns: on territorial integrity, transparency of projects and their sustainability.

- **Territorial integrity-**
The solution is contained in a proposal under consideration — to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan. The shift from the CPEC to what could be called PACE or the Pakistan-Afghanistan-China Economic corridor would necessitate a shift away from projects in Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Those projects may still be built and funded by China, but then would not constitute a part of the BRI route; as a result, India's concerns on sovereignty could be dispensed with.
- Several countries, from Europe to Central and East Asia, are now echoing India's concerns about the environmental and debt trap risks that BRI projects pose. India could take the lead in creating an international template for infrastructure and connectivity proposals, one that would seek to engage China and other donor countries in a structured approach towards debt financing. This would win India goodwill in the neighbourhood too, where every other country (apart from Bhutan) has signed on to the BRI but has felt alienated by India's rigid opposition to the initiative.

SAARC re-engagement:

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit is to take place this year, with Pakistan as the host. India's decision on attending the meeting should be rational.

- Afghanistan, which supported India's move to pull out of the SAARC summit in Islamabad in 2016 following the Uri attacks, is engaging with Pakistan again.
- Sri Lanka and Nepal, both sympathetic to India's outrage over Uri, are pushing for a summit this year.

Connecting the dots:

- The government's foreign policy moves in recent times represent a profound shift in its thinking about the neighborhood. Discuss.

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India's interest in re-energised Commonwealth

Introduction:

The Commonwealth Summit is to be held this week in London. The Indian debate on the future of the forum has certainly changed. After decades of ignoring it, Delhi now believes that a rejuvenated Commonwealth could lend greater depth to India's global outreach.

Background:

- When Jawaharlal Nehru decided to join the Commonwealth after Independence, many expressed deep discomfort with what they saw as a needless affiliation with the former colonial power. Nehru, however, stood steadfast in his commitment to the Commonwealth. For him, it was a valuable political and economic link to a major Western power during the Cold War.
- While both Indira and Rajiv saw some utility in India's membership of the Commonwealth, India's growing divergence with Britain and the West during the Cold War and an inward economic orientation severely limited Delhi's possibilities with the forum.
- As Britain itself turned to Europe, the Commonwealth began to lose much of its lustre in London.
- When India opened up to the world, politically and economically, after the Cold War, with its focus on the US and China on the one hand and South Asia on the other, the Commonwealth simply fell off India's mental map.

Delhi's renewed interest in the Commonwealth:

It has been long overdue. It is based on common sense. At a moment when India's global interests are expanding, the pragmatists in Delhi argue, India must make the best use of all available multilateral forums, including the Commonwealth.

Way ahead:

- The Commonwealth needs to give up its “prescriptive approach” on rights. The focus should be on bringing greater economic prosperity for the peoples of the forum through an enhanced trade and investment relationship.
- The Commonwealth could devote considerable energies towards the promotion of sustainable development and maritime security, which pose existential challenges to the many small and island states in the forum.
- The Commonwealth can become more valuable to its member states if it directs its aid and assistance to a few major priority areas rather than spreading its resources on a range of issues.
- India can and must do a lot of things in re-energising the Commonwealth. The government's emphasis must be on strengthening India's contribution to the Commonwealth. As the soon-to-be largest economy in the forum, India can significantly increase its levels of economic assistance, give more to the maintenance of the Secretariat, boost the current efforts on capacity building, and above all, open its economy to facilitate trade liberalisation across the Commonwealth.
- Reviving the Commonwealth is not about India taking over from Britain. It is about reordering the relationship between Delhi and London. Although the relations between India and Britain have significantly improved, Britain is yet to do what most other Western powers have done. It is to recognise that India's rise is in their own national interests. Britain has remained somewhat hesitant to align with India on the regional issues in the Subcontinent and beyond.
A significant change in that direction could help transform the bilateral relationship as well as the Commonwealth.

Conclusion:

Many British intellectuals are warning against the illusion that the Commonwealth can be a substitute for the European Union. There is no reason for India to be drawn into that internal argument in Britain. What matters for India is the terms of engagement that are on offer for a new British relationship with India and the Commonwealth in the changed domestic and international context. Negotiating favourable terms is what that should matter for Delhi.

Connecting the dots:

- A rejuvenated Commonwealth could lend greater depth to India's global outreach. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL

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 UK: Evolving relationship

Introduction:

Both India and US are undergoing changes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reforms are transforming India, and Brexit enables the UK to set its own trade and investment agenda. At the same time, technology is changing the nature of the opportunities UK and Indian businesses see. These changes offer an exciting opportunity to transform the UK-India relationship.

UK

India

Businesses:

Businesses from both countries are big investors in each other's country.

- Since 2000, the UK has been the largest G20 investor in India, investing £17.5 billion. British companies now employ a staggering 800,000 people in India, representing one in 20 jobs in India's organised private sector.
- There is a similarly positive story on Indian investment into the UK. There are around 800 Indian businesses in the UK, employing 110,000, and every year India is in the top 5 countries investing in the UK.

The volume and nature of investment has changed:

- More UK businesses are investing in India — the number of UK businesses in India has more than doubled since 2000.
- The range of sectors attracting UK investment has shifted. Advanced manufacturing, financial and professional services have remained top for decades, but the 21st century has seen strong growth in sectors such as education, retail, consumer goods, life sciences, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- The investment relationship is generating ever-more successful R&D partnerships across a wide range of sectors. The success is down to the interplay between governments, businesses, and universities/research institutions.

Examples:

- The £50 million Newton Bhabha Fund co-created by the UK and Indian governments is stimulating UK and Indian scientific research into finding solutions to the challenges facing India's economic development and social welfare.
- There are industry-academia partnerships, for example, Tata Motors-owned JLR and the Warwick Manufacturing group at Warwick University are opening the largest automotive R&D facility in Europe this year.

Industry-industry partnerships:

- These include a partnership between UK insurance major, Bupa, and Indian firms Practo and 1mg. Together, they have created an easy to access and customised holistic healthcare plan that brings health cover for Indians who currently can't access insurance and, therefore, quality healthcare.
- The Rolls Royce-TCS partnership to explore the applications of IoT in expanding Rolls Royce's manufacturing. This is the exciting place where Make in India meets Digital India. Where India meets the UK.

Positive changes ahead:

- As the UK and India forge more manufacturing and technology partnerships, there will be a greater geographical spread, with more UK businesses going into cities like Pune, Ahmedabad, Indore and Coimbatore to connect with their strong, well-developed industrial clusters.
- Indian investment into the UK, should also see a change, with Indian companies plugging into the UK's manufacturing regions, particularly across the midlands, and in cities like Sheffield and Manchester.

What more can be done?

The governments can do following to spur bilateral activity.

- For instance, a continued focus on the ease of doing business in India will make a big difference.
- Tackling non-tariff barriers through the Governments' Joint Trade Review, and
- Extending "accelerator" programmes supporting SMEs, such as the Access India Programme which is backed by the Indian Government and the Urban Gateway which is supported by the UK Government.

Conclusion:

The two countries should celebrate the scale and holistic nature of the existing bilateral

relationship, at the same time they also need to focus on how that relationship needs to evolve. New technologies should be at the heart of this evolution.

Connecting the dots:

- Both India and US are undergoing changes. Businesses from both countries are big investors in each other's country. It is time the two governments focus on how the relationship needs to evolve. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

- *India and its neighborhood- 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.*

Reinvigorating BIMSTEC

Background:

Since ancient times, regional partnerships have driven growth all over the world and brought prosperity. In today's times also, we have witnessed how Indian foreign policy has engaged with trans-regional, regional and sub-regional initiatives to nurture shared goals of regional stability and development.

BIMSTEC – What it stands for

This year will mark the 21st anniversary of the establishment of BIMSTEC - Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. In this timeframe, this regional grouping has come a very long way. Though the desired level of collaboration has evaded the organisation so far, escalating pressures in the neighbourhood of South Asia and South-East Asia have renewed pragmatic hope for stronger ties between BIMSTEC member states.

Importance for India:

BIMSTEC stands at the very important intersection of 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East

Policy’.

Encompassing seven member States — five stemming from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka) and two from South-East Asia (Myanmar and Thailand) lying in the largest bay in the world — the Bay of Bengal, BIMSTEC demonstrates regional unity as well as contiguity.

BIMSTEC could enable integration and economic development of the North-East region.

Issue:

BIMSTEC is one of the least integrated regions of the world. Renewed foreign policy and strategic focus signalled by the 2016 BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit in Goa and several that followed provides timely encouragement for the private sector to articulate a proactive engagement strategy.

Reinvigorating BIMSTEC

In alignment with the Indian foreign policy focus on BIMSTEC, FICCI convened a Core Group on BIMSTEC in 2017.

The resulting knowledge paper ‘Reinvigorating BIMSTEC, An Industry Vision for the Next Decade’ laid out powerful recommendations including-

- Creation of a BIMSTEC fund, strengthening of BIMSTEC Secretariat as well as improving government-to-business interface in the functioning of BIMSTEC.
- Lack of connectivity and timely availability of business information is the greatest hindrance to closer economic engagement. Multimodal connectivity and a speedy conclusion of the BIMSTEC FTA along with an effective energy sharing mechanism will have a multiplier effect on trade and investment.
- On a backdrop of shared history, new and fresh connections have to be forged between students and young entrepreneurs, youth icons, cultural and literary role models and elected representatives. Building Brand BIMSTEC by identifying such brand ambassadors would build soft power equity.

Conclusion:

BIMSTEC holds catalytic potential to transform economies of member states and create a peaceful, prosperous and integrated neighbourhood. The road from potential to reality will be successfully traversed only when all actors and stakeholders come together to play their role well to achieve a shared dream for peace, stability and prosperity for this dynamic region.

Connecting the dots:

- The BIMSTEC holds catalytic potential to transform economies of member states and create a peaceful, prosperous and integrated neighbourhood. For this to happen, the stakeholders need to come together to see that the required steps are taken towards its actualization. Comment.

INTERNATIONAL

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-China hostility- Undermining their own interests

Background:

Competition-cooperation-discord is an often-evoked term typology that reflects the contradictory nature of the India-China relationship. Last year witnessed all these facets play out:

- India's critique of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- India's entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.
- The dramatic crisis in Doklam on the northern frontiers.
- The acceleration of multilateral cooperation in the BRICS format and attempts to foster economic engagement.

Build-up

of

negativity:

The main reason has been a systematic build-up of negative images of how each side viewed the other's foreign policies along with a collapse in geopolitical trust.

- For India, China's attempt to raise its economic and political profile in the subcontinent was seen as an encroachment on, and an affront to, Indian authority in the neighbourhood.
- For China, India's pursuit of deeper military engagement with the former's main strategic rivals — the U.S. and Japan — was viewed as a serious challenge to its future security.

Convinced that only an assertive policy would work, both Delhi and Beijing over the past two years began exploiting leverages and pressure points to keep the other side off balance. India tilted closer to the U.S., China towards Pakistan, and on a scale not witnessed even during the Cold War years.

India-China hostility undermines the interests of both:

- An adversarial relationship with China brings no advantages and amplifies security problems that India can neither solve on its own nor address with the assistance of external powers who have shown little inclination to deflect Chinese influence in the subcontinent and its littoral.
- India-China friction enhances Pakistan's ability to shape Beijing's South Asia hand even though the latter itself would prefer a more balanced regional posture and a constructive equation with New Delhi.
- A contentious India-China relationship also reduces India's bargaining leverage vis-à-vis the U.S. and Japan. Despite their differences with Beijing, both the U.S. and Japan truly value their interdependence with China. Sino-American cooperation on the Korean nuclear question and efforts to transform North East Asian geopolitics is just one example. Japan, with a \$300 billion trading relationship with China, too wants to ensure it remains engaged with the world's second largest economy.
- The promise of economic cooperation with China can only translate into meaningful outcomes if there is overall geopolitical stability. Very few economic actors will enter the fray if bilateral ties remain uncertain and turbulent.

Conclusion:

Since 2014, India's discourse on China's rise has swung back and forth from paranoia and deep suspicion to calmer assessments of its implications for Asia and the world economy. There is now a mutual recognition in both India and China that a posture of hostility has undermined their interests. The two governments need to take steps accordingly.

Connecting the dots:

- Hostility between India and China has undermined interests of both. Comment.

INTERNATIONAL**TOPIC*****General Studies 2:***

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- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests*

Defeating terrorism in Afghanistan

In news:

The Taliban has announced its new “spring offensive” and violence in Afghanistan had escalated dangerously this year. According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the number of casualties in the first three months of 2018 was already 2,258.

Uncertainty of policy:

- Last year, the U.S. announced a new ‘South Asia policy’ for Afghanistan, which was officially welcomed by both New Delhi and Kabul and hailed as a game-changer for the region. Eight months later, the policy itself seems uncertain.
- The U.S. administration has taken some steps on Pakistani funding of terrorism across the Durand Line but it has clearly not yielded calm on the ground.

Worrisome developments:

- In a recent attack the ISIS group, a majority of the victims were Shias, highlighting the sectarian turn in the conflict.
- The statement from the Taliban rejecting Afghan President Ashraf Ghani’s offer of talks “without preconditions” and calling for the targeting of American forces in Afghanistan as part of a “spring offensive” signals the security challenge.
- According to the U.S., Afghan forces control just a little over half the territory today, down from nearly three-fourths in 2015.

It seems that the U.S. policies guiding Afghanistan, and Kabul’s efforts to protect its people, aren’t making any headway. It is necessary for both to take a more hard-headed, realistic view of the road ahead.

What needs to be done?

There is a need to stop the ‘Great Game’ for influence in Afghanistan.

- Growing U.S.-Russia tensions are creating space for proxies for both on Afghan soil, and the attacks by al-Qaeda and IS-related terror groups have their roots in the larger war between Iran and the Arab world.
- Tensions between India and Pakistan cast a shadow over Afghanistan, with India’s development assistance under attack.
- Driven by the desire to secure itself from Islamist groups, China is trying to build a rival military base in Afghanistan.

Conclusion:

Efforts have not been made for bilateral and multilateral peace talks in recent months, but each one has amounted to too piecemeal an effort. Defeating terrorism in Afghanistan needs every stakeholder to put aside differences and acknowledge that the current situation is a danger to all.

Connecting the dots:

- In order to defeat terrorism in Afghanistan there is a need to stop the ongoing 'Great Game' for influence in the country. Discuss.

INTERNATIONAL**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-China: Wuhan Summit**In****news:**

An 'informal' summit meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Wuhan concluded recently.

Significance of the summit:

- The summit was a much-needed one and has added to the ongoing attempts to bring the bilateral relations between the two Asian giants back on track.
- The Wuhan summit has underlined the necessity of an entente cordiale between the two countries, which have become increasingly distrustful of each other.
- The summit was about the desire to return to the negotiating table, not about negotiating anything specific.

Background:

India-China relations have been under great stress in recent years. The 2017 military standoff at the Doklam tri-junction vitiated a relationship that was already reeling under a great deal of pressure.

However, the recent diplomatic activities including the Wuhan summit reflects a clear change of tone in Beijing and New Delhi, reflects a positive rethink on bilateral ties and a desire to avoid future military standoffs. China is unlike India's other neighbors. It is India's biggest trading partner, and in many ways unavoidable from an economic and geopolitical point of view.

Wuhan Summit- Outcomes:

The summit's outcomes may have been limited but are very valuable to stabilize the relationship.

- The most significant outcome pertains to the contested border. Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi "underscored the importance of maintaining peace and tranquility in all areas of the India-China border region. They decided to "issue strategic guidance to their militaries to strengthen communication", essentially to avoid another Doklam-like confrontation.
- On the bilateral front, both sides addressed measures to better balance the ballooning trade deficit of about \$52 billion (of about \$84 billion bilateral trade), mostly by encouraging agricultural and pharmaceutical exports to China.
- Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi discussed a joint project in Afghanistan. The proposed joint economic project in Afghanistan could be instrumental in mitigating the trust deficit between the two sides.
- They attempted to reduce the heat over unresolved issues and so-called "irritants" in the relationship, such as China's block on India's NSG membership bid or the UN's terror designation for Pakistan-based groups, and India's opposition to the Belt and Road Initiative or its use of the Tibet issue. For this, existing mechanisms of dialogue will be strengthened, not allowing broader bilateral movement to be hit.

The message from Wuhan is an overarching one: that despite bilateral and geopolitical differences, India and China can resolve differences peacefully and through prolonged dialogue.

Conclusion:

The Wuhan summit has recommitted India and China to managing bilateral relations in a manner that creates the conditions for the "Asian Century", and Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi are well-placed to proceed along that path. Much will depend on whether the understanding developed can prevent skirmishes and drives both the countries toward mutual cooperation.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the significance of the Wuhan Summit between India and China.

ECONOMY

ECONOMY

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

General Studies 2:

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

India and Financial inclusion

Introduction:

Financial inclusion has been recognised as a key building block which will form the foundation for achieving several of UN's Sustainable Development Goals. As a construct, it provides much more than access to financial services.

Steps taken in promoting financial inclusion:

- The first step towards achieving financial inclusion was to begin with providing a bank account to a majority of our population. This was enabled through the Jan Dhan Yojana under which the government has opened over 30 crore accounts with almost 60 per cent being in rural areas. Importantly, the zero balance accounts amongst these have declined from 77 per cent in 2014 to 20 per cent now showing that the government has been successful in getting unbanked people to actively use it. Part of this has been driven through the linking of Aadhaar and doing Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) to these Jan Dhan accounts.
- The next step was to create an infrastructure which could handle all aspects of servicing such a large segment of the population. A multitude of solutions, be it UPI, BHIM, NeSL and BBPS amongst others have been created.

Progress:

All the above changes have started showing results. About a month ago, Crisil disclosed the findings of its **Inclusix financial inclusion index** for

FY2016 reporting an improvement in the overall score for India. The index gives us a rough indicator of how we have accelerated the path to financial inclusion in the last few years. The score has moved from 50 in FY2013 to 58 in FY2016 and would have been much higher at 62 this year, were it not for the re-basing and inclusion of insurance data.

More needs to be done:

Despite the improvement, credit penetration remains low at 56 per cent compared with 78 per cent deposit penetration. By providing bank accounts and establishing the requisite infrastructure, the government has created a strong foundation and ensured the availability of the bare minimum. . It now needs to gear up for the next stage in this evolution.

Way ahead:

- **Democratisation of credit:**

Availability of credit remains a major roadblock for a vast majority of the population. The biggest deterrent to resolving this has been the lack of tangible data points, which can help the credit bureaus put together better underwriting models for these unbanked customers.

This problem is now slowly being resolved as these bank accounts are linked to Aadhaar providing a consistent flow of payments data, an increasingly important parameter whilst underwriting individual credit.

- **Financialisation of savings:**

The last couple of years have seen intensive flows into investment avenues like mutual funds.

The challenge will now be to translate this model to the bottom of the pyramid. However, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work here. With the investible surplus being much lower for this segment, innovation will hold the key in designing products which are suitable for this segment.

- **Promoting financial literacy:**

Increasingly enhancing financial literacy across society is critical for the success of any other initiatives for financial inclusion.

This needs to be achieved across all age groups, for the younger populace through school education and through special programmes for the adult population. A financially literate society makes the job of financial inclusion that much easier.

Conclusion:

A lot of efforts have been put in creating widespread access and the infrastructure backbone.

The next steps mentioned above requires concerted efforts, not just by the government but equally importantly by the regulators and the financial services participants.

Connecting the dots:

- India has come far ahead in its path of financial inclusion. The next steps to achieve the goal should be- democratisation of credit, financialisation of savings and promoting financial literacy. Discuss.

ECONOMY

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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General Studies 2:

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

Reforming the vocational education/training system in India

Background:

In 2016, the Government of India formed the Sharada Prasad Committee to rationalise the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) and improve 'Skill India'. The committee submitted its report in 2016. Now over a year later, it may be prudent to look at the reforms it suggested and action taken in the vocational education/training (VET) system.

Goals of 'Skill India':

- To meet employers' needs of skills.
- To prepare workers (young and old) for a decent livelihood.

The Sharada Prasad Committee's report:

The recurring theme in the report is its focus on youth. Each recommendation underlines that-

- The VET is not just for underprivileged communities.
- It is not a stopgap arrangement for those who cannot make it through formal education. It is for all of us.

Streaming for students:

It suggests concrete steps to ensure a mindset change, such as-

- Having a separate stream for vocational education (in secondary education).
- Creating vocational schools and vocational colleges for upward mobility.
- Having a Central university to award degrees and diplomas.

China, for instance, has such a separate stream after nine years of compulsory schooling, and half the students choose VET at the senior secondary level (after class nine).

A global alignment:

Aligning the courses to international requirements, ensuring a basic foundation in the 3Rs, and life-long learning is required.

- National standards for an in-demand skill set with national/global mobility that translates into better jobs. Short duration courses (with no real skills) that provide low pay for suboptimal jobs cannot be called national standards. Hence the current national standards have to drastically improve.
- The focus should be in strengthening reading, writing and arithmetic skills. No skill development can succeed if most of the workforce lacks the foundation to pick up skills in a fast-changing world.

Strengthening regulation:

As in other industries, the regulator has displayed a limited capacity to regulate.

- Cases of a conflict of interests, of rigged assessments and of training happening only on paper are not new.
- A recent parliamentary report on private ITIs reported that the number of private ITIs has grown from under 2,000 to over 11,000 in five years. It points to failure of regulation, accompanied by a lack of quality training on offer at such ITIs.
- There is a huge ethics and accountability issue if there is no credible assessment board and when there are too many sector skill councils, each trying to maximise their business.

The Sharada Prasad Committee had recommended that the number of SSCs should correspond to the National Industrial (Activity) Classification (which has 21 economic activities across the entire economy).

Unification of the entire VET system:

This should be first policy step. What we have today are fragmented pillars. An NSDC-centric focus has left the skill

development efforts of 17 ministries out of the same scrutiny. 'Skill India' can have an impact only when all of them work together and learn from each other.

Enhancing employer ownership:

The private sector places the onus of unemployment on the government, treating it as a welfare responsibility, while the government looks to the private sector since it is the end consumer of skills.

The result is that only 36% of India's organised sector firms conduct in-firm training.

- In this regard the committee's recommendation of a reimbursable industry contribution model (applicable only to the organised sector) should solve the problem. It could ensure reimbursements for those companies undertaking training while rewarding industry for sharing and undertaking skilling until everyone in the company is skilled.

Conclusion:

India can surely become the world's skill capital but not with what it is doing right now. The reforms suggested by the committee can be a good starting point. Taking advantage of the Indian demographic dividend must be a key part of India's growth story.

Connecting the dots:

- The Skill India mission needs certain reforms. In this light discuss the recommendations made by the Sharada Prasad Committee.

ECONOMY

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General Studies 3:

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General Studies 2:

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Reaching the 5T mark: Transforming Agriculture, Manufacturing and Services

Background:

Last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of India becoming a "Five Trillion Dollar"

economy.

How soon we can reach the 5T mark? What growth rate is required? What changes we need to introduce?

Current size of the economy:

There are two measures of GDP — at constant prices (2011-12) and current prices. Currently, India's GVA is \$1.8 trillion, GDP at constant price \$2 trillion, and GDP at current price \$1.8 trillion.

World Bank says India's GDP is expected to grow at 7.3 per cent in 2018-19. The RBI's figure is 7.4 per cent.

The GDP at current prices will reach 5T in 2027 at this growth rate. So if we sustain the base growth rate of 7.4 per cent, we will become a 5T economy within ten years.

However, an ambitious agenda of change can push growth rates upwards. But achieving such high growth will require exceptional structural changes in all sectors of the economy.

How to reach 5T?

To reach 5T, we need to shift our perspective from policy to projects. Select sectoral initiatives can be converted into 100 projects. Each to be led by a competent leader with proven skills. The regular bureaucracy would facilitate the job of the project leader, who will be free to choose her team.

Transforming Agriculture: By setting up a thousand world-class farms across the country

Most farmers do not have the capacity or means to benefit from the existing schemes. A new model can be tried- where farmers learn to be productive by working in association with a professional firm which takes care of farming, marketing, and exports.

The implementation will cover less than one per cent of the arable land and cost no money to the government.

- To implement, the government will need to identify 1,000 agriculture development regions (ADRs) each with a minimum area of 200 sq. km. State governments will take this land on a 10-year lease from the willing farmers. In return, the State governments will assess a farmer's 10-year income and agree to pay double the amount in annual instalments. Farmers will remain the landowners.
- Next, the States will invite corporate farming ventures (CFVs) to work on each of the ADRs for 10 years. In return, CFVs will pay the money that the States promised to pay the farmers.

- The CFVs will apply modern techniques and investments to produce and market high-quality products. Farmers may work on the land and imbibe the right practices. Soon, the best practices will spread to adjoining areas.

The model will turn millions of farmers into smart and prosperous entrepreneurs. ADRs will contribute substantially to production and exports.

Transforming manufacturing:

Challenge- Trade war-like situation emerging between the US and China, and MNCs looking for alternative manufacturing locations.

India has to focus on setting manufacturing ecosystem for the skill and labour intensive product groups like machinery. This skill and labour-intensive products group can absorb part of surplus people from the agriculture or informal sector.

Successful operations would require sector-specific policies and inviting an anchor firm for each major product group. Flexible labour laws are an essential precondition for large-scale manufacturing.

Over 70 per cent of India's exports come from the manufacturing sector. New manufacturing operations will allow India to become part of a few global value chains and help in raising exports to a trillion dollar mark.

Transforming services:

Services contribute to 56.5 per cent of GDP but create only 30 per cent of jobs. So far, IT sector has been the star, exporting over 80 per cent of its \$150 billion turnover. As over 50 per cent of IT revenues come from the US, the future looks challenging with Trump at the helm.

Way ahead:

- As over 40 per cent of the IT jobs India does will disappear due to automation, the sector needs to develop expertise in IOT, AI, and their applications.
- Travel and tourism, health, and professional services can be the other star service sectors.
- Better delivery of infrastructure, education and essential services would also create a large number of jobs and growth.
- The travel and tourism sector created 40 million jobs and contributed a significant 10 per cent to GDP. Considering the variety of experiences India offers, the sector can grow manifold with project-driven investments in budget hotels, medical tourism, tourist safety, and top 100 attractions.
- India as a global healthcare jobs provider can be another big story. Global healthcare and wellness is a \$8 trillion industry, which would require over 100 million health workers in the next 15 years.

- The construction sector's potential is largely untapped. It has slowed in the past two years but remains big with over 8 per cent share in GDP. It is the largest job-generating sector after Agriculture. The sector lacks transparency, and millions of buyers stand cheated in the hands of builders every year. Ensuring transparency and ease will revive the sector attracting FDI and create millions of new jobs.

Connecting the dots:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi, recently, spoke of India becoming a "Five Trillion Dollar" economy. Suggest what changes we need to introduce to achieve the goal at the earliest.
- Transforming agriculture, manufacturing and services sectors in a project mode can help India reach the goal of 5 trillion economy soon. Analyze.

ECONOMY

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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.*

Reforming private sector banks

Introduction:

The recent banking scams have underlined the issues of propriety and governance. What started off as a problem with PSBs has come a full circle with the focus now shifted to private banks (ICICI case). Any kind of financial crisis offers an opportunity for introspection where rules can be reformulated to bring them in sync with the new order. It is necessary to continuously revisit systems, laws and practices and bring them up to date.

Concerns:

- The banking scams have brought to focus not just the lack of transparency in the functioning of banks but also that of audit and inspection practices.
- Also, the allocation of responsibility for identifying and ensuring remedial action is not clear and needs to be delineated now.

Clear lines of thought need to be put down and the new rules should be formulated so that there is less ambiguity in future.

Banks' perspective

- First, in a private bank who is to uphold the moral responsibility- the CEO, or executive Board members or the non-executive Board members? Whenever there is a conflict of interest, it has to be clear as to which executives are to be held accountable. If it is the CEO who is accountable, then does that imply that none of his relatives can have any credit dealings with the concerned bank. This seems unreasonable. Way out: One way to get around the above problem would be to disclose the financial dealings of the relatives, if any, in the Annual Report or the bank's web site. By making such disclosures upfront, the bank can ensure that no questions are raised in future. Hence greater transparency is the key to avoiding such 'conflict of interest' issues.
- The performance of bankers has come under the lens. Can the central bank or the government have a say in the salary package of a private company? The answer is probably 'no' because in the private sector Boards take a call on this issue. This should be debated and the rules must be clearly laid out.
- The tenure of the CEO is always open to debate. Allowing anyone to carry on for more than a term of say five years is a call taken by shareholders or Boards. But allowing such extensions also lead to creation of power centres affecting the grooming of second rung leaders. Ironically in PSBs, CEOs have short terms as they get their positions closer to retirement while in private banks they begin their tenures at an early age – and can often get a stint of more than a decade before they retire.

Regulator's perspective

From the regulator's side, the issues that need to be addressed are:

- The responsibility of the Boards should be clear on issues of governance and any deviance from regulation or conflict of interest should be discussed at this level.
- The presence of a nominee director of the regulator on the Board, though controversial, is justified as he is the 'ear of the public' and ensures that all compliances are in order.
- When audit reports are carried out on banks, the lacunae or important findings should be made public so that everyone is aware of them. It can be put up on the web site of the regulator or the concerned bank.

- As a practice of good governance, the regulators too should disclose on their web sites the names of the relatives of the senior officials who are employed with the regulated entities. This will add to transparency in operations of the system.

Conclusion:

It is the right time to take the necessary action in revising the rules and regulations concerning the functioning of banks, their boards and CEOs. Rather than getting obsessed with moral issues, a practical way would be to strengthen the regulatory framework and review it every two years based on the banks' response.

Connecting the dots:

- The recent banking scams have underlined the issues of propriety and governance. What started off as a problem with PSBs has come a full circle with the focus now shifted to private banks. It is the right time to take the necessary action in revising the rules and regulations concerning the functioning of banks, their boards and CEOs. Discuss.

ECONOMY

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

Preventing defaults: Reducing NPAs

Background:

Both Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi cheated the Indian banks of over Rs. 22,000 crore and are enjoying their ill-gotten gains after fleeing India. To put the matter into perspective Rs. 22,000 crore is a small fraction of the total Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) of banks that runs into lakhs of crores. A very large percentage of these NPAs are loans to corporates. Defaults by retail borrowers are small. From this it is obvious that the banking system is being exploited by willful defaulters — mainly large borrowers to get their loans passed without a thorough scrutiny or project appraisal.

These unscrupulous borrowers either exploit the inefficiencies in the banking system or collude with bank officials to defraud the system.

Solution:

It may not be possible to completely eliminate NPAs. But structural reforms in two areas could definitely improve the situation significantly:

- The management of PSBs.
- Handling of cases of bank frauds by investigating agencies.

What needs to be done?

Following steps which, if implemented, would go a long way in reducing NPAs over a period of time.

Selection**criteria:**

The system of selection and appointment of top officials — executive directors, board members and chairperson — in banks needs a complete overhaul. The person at the helm of the affairs can make or break an organisation.

- The quality of top management is one of the main problems in PSBs.
- There is political interference in the selection process. Merit is seldom considered as the main criteria.
- Expecting an official who paid for his or her promotion to be upright or righteous is difficult. Such officials would also be compelled to advance loans whenever 'a request' is received from his or her mentors in 'Delhi', often without an appropriate credit appraisal.
- The accountability systems in banks are practically non-existent.

The first reform should thus be to put in place a mechanism to ensure selection of competent and honest bankers.

Skilling**senior****staff:**

Ensuring that senior bankers are well trained in project appraisal. Project finance requires different skill sets than those acquired by bankers in routine banking operations.

Earlier, development financial institutions such as ICICI and IDBI had strong project appraisal departments. The public-sector banks have no institutional mechanism to develop such skills.

Strengthening**the****vigilance****departments:**

Strengthen the vigilance departments.

- There is no effective vigilance mechanism in PSBs.
- Even if the vigilance finds any lapses on the part of top officials, they are seldom reported.

An effective vigilance department would be able to detect a 'quid pro quo' in awarding a loan or a nexus between a bank official and a rogue borrower in flouting the norms.

Time-bound**probe:**

There is a need for time-bound investigations.

- Some cases of large NPAs which are in the public domain or there is evidence of willful default are referred to Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The agency takes years to conclude a case, by the time many witnesses would have retired and forgotten the details of the case or even be dead.

It should be made mandatory that every case should be concluded in two years. In exceptional (more complicated cases) situations, it could be extended to three years.

Raising accountability:

- The government is the majority owner of PSBs and it has a big say in their management. Usually, the government is represented on bank board by bureaucrats from the Ministry of Finance. These officers often come with little experience or knowledge in banking. But being the representatives of the owner as well as being closer to the political powers, they exercise a disproportionately large influence on the decisions taken by the Board. Yet the irony is that they are never held responsible for the decisions.

So the system needs to change.

- Appointing officers for a longer period of time in the same ministry and provide them with training in banking and financial services.
- Induction of professionals from the industry who could bring in necessary expertise.

Finally, the regulator — the Reserve Bank of India — has a major role in safeguarding the health of banks. It cannot absolve itself from this responsibility just by ` announcing quick-fix-measures immediately after a fraud is unearthed. The RBI has enough powers even to replace a bank board when it comes to safeguarding the depositors' money.

Conclusion:

The rot in the Indian banking system is deep but it can be treated. Unless the measures suggested are implemented effectively, the banking system would continue to burn cash for the politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen. And the people of India, including the poorest of the poor would continue to pay the price.

Connecting the dots:

- Eliminating NPAs needs structural reforms in two areas- the management of PSBs and the way cases of bank frauds are handled by investigating agencies. Discuss.

HEALTH

HEALTH/NATIONAL

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*

Bringing in behavioral change for success of healthcare policies

Background:

The World Health Day, which is celebrated every year on April 7, happens to be the day (in 1948) when the constitution of World Health Organization (WHO) came into force under the flag of the United Nations. This year's World Health Day happens to be the 70th anniversary of WHO, which is being celebrated with the theme "Universal Health Coverage: Everyone, Everywhere".

Healthcare challenges in India:

One can talk at length about the healthcare challenges India faces.

- The country's diversity in terms of geography, culture, and demography
- Political system
- Unsafe boundaries
- Huge population burden
- Poor investment in health

Changing the behaviour pattern of the Indian masses, including the patient population, is something which has been focused upon much yet.

How behavioural patterns, old traditions, beliefs, and habits affect the success of healthcare efforts?

A case study:

Gramin Health Care clinics were set up at IFFCO bazaars. The clinics were strategically located at IFFCO bazaars to ensure easy accessibility for a cluster of nearby villages. People were expected to begin accessing a modern healthcare clinic, which was operational throughout the year. However, the turnout was very low.

A new approach was adopted- holding camps and reaching out to the villages and people started responding. The experience of interacting with the villagers exposed the strong hold that conventional beliefs and habits had on people. The lack of trust on existing healthcare models was evident given over the years, thousands of villages in India were left untouched by primary healthcare.

Busting various myths, sharing continued education and awareness, and rendering door-to-door services especially for women and child care — triggered a change in the behavioural patterns of the villagers who began trusting a scientifically sound model, and moved away from long entrenched practices of going to quacks and unqualified doctors. In a short span, daily footfall at the clinics increased.

The roadmap:

A public policy promoting health awareness and healthcare delivery is unlikely to succeed if no efforts are made to modify individual behaviour.

The focus needs to be towards the following:

- **Effective people participation and engagement** in healthier practices is essential. The more **interactive health policies** are, the higher will be chances of developing public understanding.
- New care delivery models should have **behaviour change as a core component**.
- **Convincing the influencers first** is vital. From the head of the village panchayat to celebrities, there needs to be a strategic approach in taking their help in bringing about behavioural change.
- **Using modern technology** to bridge the gap is key. Social media, digitisation, tele-assisted medicine, video and audio campaigns can play a significant role in reaching to the remotest of regions.
- The role of incentives and penalties cannot be overstated in bringing about behavioural change.
- Including more accountable stakeholders is also important.

Conclusion:

Approaching healthcare policies from the behavioural angle can ensure better systemic efficiency and large-scale transformation.

Connecting the dots:

- Ensuring behavioral change for the success of any policy is crucial, same is the case when it comes to health policy. Discuss. Also suggest measures to bring the behavioral change for the success of healthcare efforts.

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

The Ayushman Bharat Programme: Challenges

Introduction:

A nation's development and growth is gauged by the health of its population. The fact that even after 70 years of independence, 80 per cent of the Indian population is not covered under any health insurance scheme and the average cost of in-patient treatment is almost half of their annual household expenditure is bound to affect India's growth. The announcement of the National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS) under the Ayushman Bharat Programme, in the Union Budget 2018-19, is timely and can be a trigger to achieving the country's growth aspirations.

Challenges:

The programme will cover 40 per cent of the population — 50 crore people in the first phase.

- A FICCI-EY study in 2012 estimated that to implement UHC in India by 2022, the government would need to allocate health expenditure between 3.7-4.5 per cent of the GDP, as against 1.4 per cent in 2017-18.
- The bed-to-population ratio needs to be raised to 1.7 beds per 1,000 population from the current 0.9 beds.
- The country needs another 9 lakh graduate doctors for primary care and around 1.2 lakh specialist doctors for secondary and tertiary care services.

Way ahead:

- The hospital business, particularly the multi-speciality tertiary care business, is capital-intensive with a long gestation period. Financing options along with incentives and tax benefits need to be provided to the private sector to aid development of healthcare infrastructure in Tier II and Tier III cities.
- Since health is a State subject and States are expected to contribute 40 per cent funding for the scheme, it will be critical to streamline and harmonise the existing State health insurance schemes and RSBY to NHPS.
- The choice of purchasing model and empanelling providers would be critical to the success of NHPS. Countries with both public and private health infrastructure, such as France, Germany, China and Indonesia, have opted for dual mechanism — “provision by government and contract in from private providers”
- Reimbursement slabs should be objective, transparent and linked to accreditation according to the hospital categories. National Costing Guidelines and a standard costing template should be used for calculating reimbursement packages.

Improving clinical and operational efficiencies in the supply side:

Standardisation in clinical practice and other processes needs to be implemented through:

- Adoption of standard treatment guidelines, electronic health record standards, clinical audits etc. across public and private hospitals,
- Framing of referral protocols and implementing effective mechanisms for supervision leveraging technology.
- Integration of technology at each level of the healthcare continuum such as tele-medicine for remote locations, health call-centres, tele-radiology, app based emergency response etc.

Addressing workforce woes:

In addition to strengthening the number of healthcare professionals, we need focused skilling, re-skilling and up-skilling programmes for existing as well as additional workforce. Three key steps in this direction would be:

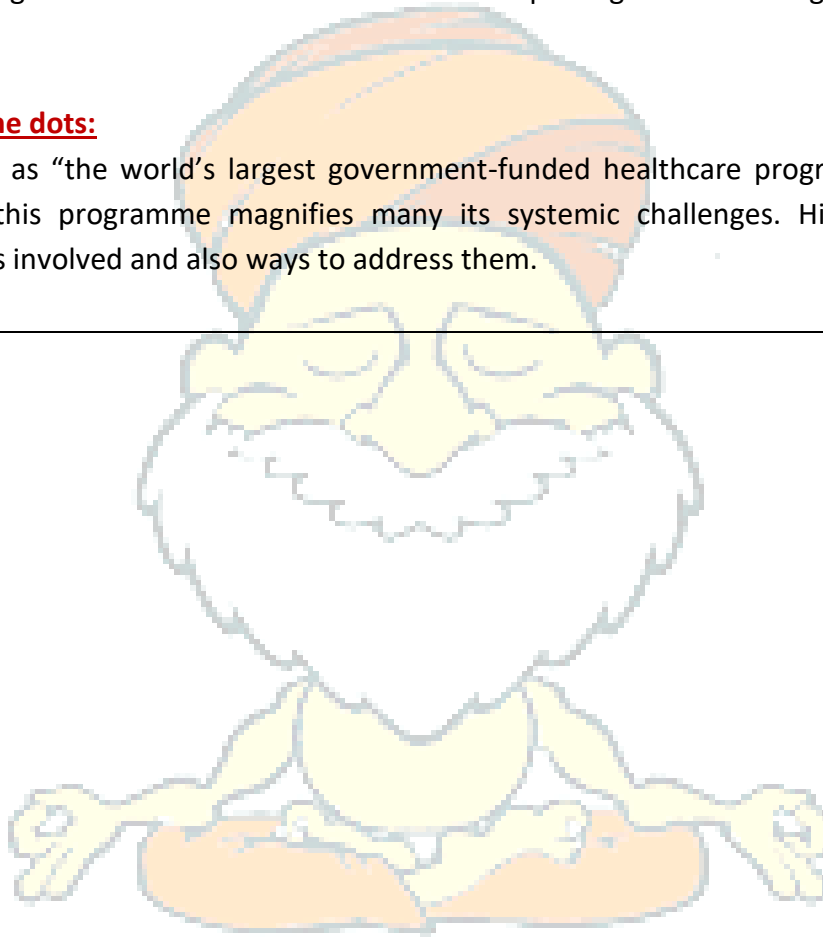
- Providing technical as well as soft skill training to **Ayushman Mitras**, with adequate incentives and provisions for periodic re-training and upgradation of skills,
- Making General Practitioners (GPs) responsible for overseeing the primary health network and incentivising them to prevent the number of hospitalisations
- Introducing a nurse practitioner system in strict compliance with established clinical protocols, where they are authorised to handle several clinical responsibilities.

Addressing grievances:

- NHPS must use biometric enrolment process, mobile and app based technologies for claim processes and payment wallets for real-time payments to streamline claim management. A robust fraud and abuse control mechanism should be implemented through use of digital technologies, business intelligence frameworks and standards for de-empanelment.
- A Grievance Redressal Forum should be created to ensure timely resolution of complaints without intervention of civil or consumer courts.
- The government must encourage and recognise transparency, self-regulation and third party ratings and reward clinical outcomes to help bridge the widening trust deficit in the sector.

Connecting the dots:

- Described as “the world’s largest government-funded healthcare programme”, the sheer scale of this programme magnifies many its systemic challenges. Highlight the major challenges involved and also ways to address them.



AGRICULTURE

AGRICULTURE/ECONOMY

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*

Reforming Farmer Producer Organisations: Doubling farmers' income

Background:

The government has this lofty goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022. Among the different instruments to achieve this goal, promotion of new and scaling up of existing Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) have been given focus.

Concept:

Given the extremely small landholdings, FPOs, through collectivisation, which leads to economies of scale, are supposed to address the problems and improve the bargaining power of farmers through backward (inputs) and forward linkages (marketing to processors and retailers).

An

analysis:

Have FPOs been successful in reducing input costs and bridging the gap between farm and market prices — a marker of farmers' bargaining power? Have they been successful in providing more markets and eased credit constraints of group members?

Bihar case study:

To address the above questions, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) implemented a study of FPOs in Bihar.

The results show some success but also several challenges.

- The farmers seem to have tasted some success in getting information on crops and technology, inputs (seeds, fertilisers and pesticides) at cheaper rates, higher price for their produce, and linking with new markets.

- FPOs seem to falter in terms of risk mitigation. Sixty-five per cent FPO farmers rate sudden collapse in market price as their biggest fear.
- One of the biggest challenges for FPOs is ineptness in accessing capital (mere 3 per cent farmers reported improved credit access post-membership).
- One of the prime motives behind formation of FPO or FPC is to provide capital access. Around 59 per cent FPO farmers reported status quo in access to capital.
- The other challenges are lack of proper monitoring, no or incomplete record of farmer members, no penalties for wrongdoers, no incentives for good performance, and other problems like free-riding.
- Lack of proper monitoring and evaluation seems to be hampering the growth of FPOs. Many of them do not have records about members, and several farmers themselves do not know whether they are members or not.

Way ahead:

- The FPOs need a proper selection mechanism for the promoters/organization as well as members based on merit.
- **Optimal size determination:** It is always convenient to monitor smaller group. Smaller sub groups, of 25-30 members, within a group could be easier to monitor and can also deliver better on attributes like quality and food safety.
- **Optimal composition:** Participation of members with different skills is important to reap the gains based on comparative advantage. Heterogeneity in that sense is desirable. Policy should try to minimise the entry barriers for farmers based on social, economic and political factors so benefits of different skills can flow.
- **Product differentiation:** FPOs can maximise prices for farmers if their products are differentiated.
Product differentiation levers can be taken, such as freshness (plucked in the morning on day of sales), organic (small farmers hardly use fertilisers/pesticides for vegetables and fruits), and some local sourcing identifiers. There can also be differentiation of products by packaging. If farmers start packaging their products properly, they can command a price premium.

Connecting the dots:

- Among the different instruments to achieve the goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022, promotion of new and scaling up of existing Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) have been given focus. Various survey shows FPOs aren't working as desired. Discuss the challenges and the way ahead.

DEFENCE/SECURITY

DEFENCE/SECURITY

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

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

New Defence Production Policy 2018: Where did we fail in past?

Introduction:

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has recently released the draft of a new defence production policy 2018. It seeks to replace the policy announced in 2011. The ministry has asked for comments on the draft from the stakeholders by March 31, 2018.

The

draft:

The goal is to achieve self-reliance in development and manufacture in thirteen major areas of production, a turnover of Rs 1,70,000 crore, involving an investment of nearly Rs 70,000 crore and the creation of two to three million jobs, and exports of Rs 35,000 crore by 2025. The objective is to make India a global leader in Cyberspace and Artificial Intelligence technologies.

Issue:

The provisions mentioned under the draft policy will not be easy to implement.

- The proposed increase in the cap on foreign direct investment (FDI) in defence, originally fixed at 26 per cent in 2001, is a case in point. In 2010, the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) had suggested the removal of the cap altogether. Subsequently, in 2013, the then Commerce Minister had also recommended raising the FDI cap to 74 per cent. But it was only in 2014 that the cap was raised, that too to 49 per cent, by the present government. There are sharply divided views on raising the cap beyond 49 per cent.

- The promises contained in the recently released draft are so intertwined that a comprehensive action plan would be required to implement all of them almost simultaneously for achieving the policy objective.
- Experience shows that policy decisions often get derailed by delays in working out the modality of implementing them or because many loose ends are left untied while notifying the scheme. Disjointed efforts and promises cannot form the basis of a robust policy.

Poor progress on past initiatives:

- New impetus was given to defence production under the 'Make in India' programme through initiatives such as the introduction of 'Make I' and 'Make II' sub-categories in DPP 2016.
- Introduction of the Strategic Partnership Model in 2017.
- The increase in FDI to 49 per cent in 2014.
- The easing of the industrial licensing process during the last couple of years.

All the above initiatives have been facing strong headwinds:

- The process to identify the Indian entities under the Strategic Partnership Model is yet to begin.
- Just about Rs 1 crore has been received by way of FDI in defence in the last four years.
- Industrial licenses were held up for a long time because of the row between the DIPP and the Ministry of Home Affairs on the question of jurisdiction to issue the license.

Way ahead:

The MoD should back up the objectives mentioned in the new policy with adequate budget outlays.

- If Indian companies must become self-reliant in making fighter aircraft, warships, combat vehicles, and the like, there has to be a market for their products. Defence being a monopsony, MoD will need to sustain domestic production by buying their products in large numbers.
- The achievability of the stated objectives and goals in the draft policy does not seem to be in sync with the current trajectory of defence budget outlays. The credibility of the new defence production policy is inextricably interlinked with the financial viability of the roadmap envisaged therein as well as the ability of the MoD to take hard decisions to remove programme-specific roadblocks.

Conclusion:

Self-reliance has been the goal of India's defence production strategy since the 1960s. The fact is that more than five decades later India has emerged as the largest importer of arms.

The problem all along has been that policies, strategies and procedures have seldom been based on lack of understanding about issues afflicting defence production: disjointed efforts, never factoring financial viability, and tardy implementation – all largely because of structural issues within the MoD. The above problems should to be resolved so that the objectives mentioned under the new policy are achieved.

Connecting the dots:

- Self-reliance as a goal of India's defence production strategy since the 1960s remains unachieved. The problem all along has been that policies, strategies and procedures have seldom been based on lack of understanding about issues afflicting defence production. Discuss.

DEFENCE/SECURITY

TOPIC

General Studies 2:

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

General Studies 3:

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

Self-reliance in Defence and Aerospace

Background:

Marking the 20th anniversary of the strategic partnership between India and France, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron had a summit meeting in New Delhi in March 2018. Fourteen agreements were signed, including those related to strategic maritime awareness, logistical support between armed forces, and exchange of classified information.

France is a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in India, with about 750 big French companies, with a cumulative investment of \$5.82 billion between April 2000 and June 2017. Over 150 Indian companies are operating in France, employing around 7,000 people.

Joint statement: India and France

The joint statement acknowledged that “the Make-in-India initiative offers a valuable

opportunity for Indian and French defence enterprises to enter into arrangements for co-development and co-production of defence equipment in India, including through transfer of know-how and technologies to the mutual benefit of all parties”.

India's

policy:

The draft defence production policy, 2018, under consideration now, envisions India as one of the world's top five defence producers by 2025, with self-reliance in 13 areas covering almost the entire range of weapons and systems. The export target has been fixed at Rs35,000 crore (\$5 billion) by 2025. The FDI limit is proposed to be raised to 74% under the automatic route for “niche technologies”.

India's need:

- India faces complex security challenges as it has hostile nuclear armed neighbours to its north and west, with unresolved borders.
- The international community expects India to be a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region.

Such security responsibilities require best-of-class armed forces.

Challenges:

In its quest for the best, and for self-reliance, in defence and aerospace, India's greatest challenge is to bridge the technology gap. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2017), India has continued to be the largest arms importer in the last five years, with an import dependency running in excess of 60%.

Favoring factors:

Strong factors favouring India are its colossal requirements, strength of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and a large young population with good basic skills. There are over 6,000 MSMEs in the defence sector, with many more capable of contributing to defence and aerospace in case they find the right opportunity.

Way ahead:

- In order to achieve the targets, it is important for the armed forces to define requirements, both in terms of numbers and technology, well in advance, with a fair degree of certainty.
- The defence industry requires long gestation periods for design and development. This investment offers good returns in the long run as the life cycle of major equipment is long, with recurring sustenance requirements.

- In order to optimize the opportunity to mutual advantage, we have to transition from “Buy (Global)” or “Buy & Make” to “Make in India”. This requires engagements to commence upstream in the process of design and development.
- Innovation partnership at the academia-industry level between countries is an imperative.
- MSMEs from India are capable, and deserve their place in global supply chains.
- The aerospace policy and industry need to view the aviation sector, both military and civil, holistically.
- The policy for UAVs needs to be put in place at the earliest to ensure that the vast resources committed to this industry get a direction. The recently announced defence industrial corridors, and the MSME clusters therein, need to embrace the aviation sector.
- Most importantly, the energy of the public and private sector has to be harnessed together to be able to achieve self-reliance by 2025.

Conclusion:

The intent to go deeper than just a buyer-seller relationship is distinctly manifest in both, the India-France joint statement of March 2018 and the draft defence production policy, 2018.

Connecting the dots:

- India's quest for self-reliance, in defence and aerospace is just given its huge potential. However, there are certain challenges which needs to be overcome. Discuss.

DEFENCE/SECURITY

TOPIC

General Studies 3:

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

General Studies 2:

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

Setting up of Defence Planning Committee: A significant policy reform

Introduction:

In a significant defence policy reform, the government, has revamped the existing defence planning system by establishing a Defence Planning Committee (DPC) under the chairmanship of the National Security Adviser (NSA). This new institutional mechanism, set up as a permanent body, is intended to “facilitate a comprehensive and integrated planning for defence matters” – a vital ingredient in defence preparedness.

Comprehensive and integrated planning was missing in the mechanism set up in the early 2000s in the wake of the Kargil conflict. The new measure is likely to have a far reaching consequence on the way defence planning is undertaken and on defence preparedness.

Salient Features of the New Mechanism:

The heart of the new institutional mechanism is the all-powerful DPC with the NSA at the helm.

- The Committee has a cross-section of members drawn from the higher echelons of the civil and military services including the three service chiefs, the Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, and Secretary (Expenditure) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Besides, the NSA is empowered to co-opt other members as and when required.

The charter of duties of the DPC is two-fold.

- To *analyse and evaluate all relevant inputs relating to defence planning*, which includes- the national defence and security priorities, foreign policy imperatives, relevant strategic and security-related doctrines, defence acquisition and infrastructure development plans, including the 15-year Long-Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP), defence technology and development of the Indian defence industry and global technological advancement.
- To prepare at least five different sets of drafts including:
 - > National security strategy, strategic defence review and doctrines;
 - > International defence engagement strategy;
 - > Roadmap to build defence manufacturing eco-system;
 - > Strategy to boost defence exports; and
 - > Prioritised capability development plans for the armed forces over different time-frames in consonance with the overall priorities, strategies and likely resource flows.

In order to assist the functioning of the DPC, the new mechanism provides for four sub-committees, one each on Policy and Strategy, Plans and Capability Development, Defence Diplomacy, and Defence Manufacturing Eco-System. The reports of the DPC are to be submitted to the Defence Minister and further approval are to be taken as required.

Present**system:**

It was thought that the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) as the ultimate arbitrator of all requirements of the armed forces including the planning aspects would bridge a key gap in the existing defence planning mechanism.

- With the CDS not finding favour with successive political dispensations, the existing system of planning is perceived to have given way to the parochial interests of various stakeholders.

This has had an adverse impact not only on how security threats were perceived by various security organs, but also on how scarce resources are distributed among the services and within the various branches of each service.

- The existing planning process has had very little control on aspects like indigenisation and self-reliance in defence procurement matters.

Conclusion:

With the powerful DPC in place and the NSA assuming the role of de facto CDS for all practical purposes other than in operational matters, the defence planning process is expected to become more rational as well as provide a much needed boost to defence preparedness. The DPC is expected to clearly articulate the key national security/ defence/ military goals as well as prioritise defence and security requirements as per the likely available resources while at the same time providing adequate focus on emerging security challenges, technological advancements, and establishing a strong indigenous defence manufacturing base.

Connecting the dots:

- The establishment of Defence Planning Committee recently, will have a far-reaching consequence on the way defence planning is undertaken and on defence preparedness. Discuss.

(PRELIMS+MAINS FOCUS)**Bringing private banks under the watch of CVC**

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Key issues related to governance

Key pointers:

- The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has urged the Prime Minister's Office to bring private sector banks under its watch, citing the fact that they have been involved in many recent instances of malfeasance.

Present system:

- Vigilance officers in all State-owned public sector banks are required to report irregularities and possible wrongdoing to the CVC, India's apex body for checking corruption in the government.
- Private sector banks are out of the CVC's purview, but are subjected to statutory audits from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Deviating from norms:

- Private banks have deviated from norms that govern the disclosure of non-performing assets (NPAs), leading to under-reporting.
- The processes followed for lending decisions among private lenders have also come under the scanner.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/cvc-wants-to-keep-an-eye-on-private-banks/article23409947.ece>

Increasing casualties among children in J&K

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Internal security

Key pointers:

- At least 318 children have been killed in J&K in 14 years — from 2003 up to 2017 — and constitute 6.95% of the casualties in the ongoing conflict in the State, according to a study by the J&K Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS).

- The report, titled 'Terrorized: Impact of Violence on the Children of Jammu and Kashmir', says that children (less than 17 years old) "were not viewed differently by armed forces" and have been targeted as part of the offensive.
- At least 144 children were killed by the security forces and the State police, "which alone accounts for 44.02% of the total [number of] children killed".

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/318-children-killed-in-14-years-study/article23409844.ece>

Softbank and China's Joint Solar Venture to come up in India

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Energy security, Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- Japan's SoftBank Group has signed an agreement with China's Golden Concord Group Ltd (GCL) to set up a joint venture firm with a \$930-million investment. The JV firm will manufacture and sell solar equipment in India.
- The firm, which intends to work on the photovoltaic (PV) technology that is used in solar panels, will manufacture PV ingots, wafers, batteries and component.
- Softbank Investment Advisors will fund the project through its *Softbank Vision Fund*, which is the world's largest technology investment fund, with backing from Apple, Foxconn and Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund among others.

Background:

- In March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had set a target of achieving 100 GW of solar power by 2022, out of the total 175 GW of electricity the country intends to produce from renewable. This was termed as the world's largest renewable energy expansion programme.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/article23420560.ece>

India and Nepal to jointly lay 900 MW Hydropower Project

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Nepalese counterpart KP Sharma Oli will jointly lay the foundation stone of the 900 MW Arun III hydropower project.
- The foundation stone of the hydroelectricity project will be laid in Sankhuwasabha district of eastern Nepal.
- The power project has been developed by Sutlej Jala Vidhyut Nigam (SJVN), an Indian state-run utility.
- This is the largest hydroelectric project undertaken by the India government in Nepal and it gained momentum after Modi came to power in 2014.
- India will provide a total of \$ 1.5 billion for the project which is being constructed on the build, operate, own and transfer (BOOT) model.

Article link: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/modi-oli-to-lay-foundation-of-900mw-power-project-in-nepal/story-EYRPNzL3tGyFSC9lf1qSNO.html>

NAM Conference, Azerbaijan

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj has embarked a three-day official visit to Azerbaijan's capital city Baku to participate in Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Ministerial Conference.
- The NAM Mid-Term Ministerial Conference will be held in Baku on 5-6 April under the theme of "*Promoting international peace and security for sustainable development*".

India and Azerbaijan:

- During the visit, EAM will hold bilateral consultations with her Azerbaijani counterpart. The two sides will discuss bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest.
- India and Azerbaijan enjoy warm and friendly relations based on historical and cultural ties.
- They have growing bilateral cooperation in many areas including energy, transportation, and capacity building.

Article link: http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/sushma-swaraj-embarks-3-day-visit-to-baku-118040400255_1.html

One candidate, one seat

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Salient features of ROPA Act.

Key pointers:

- A petition has been filed in SC challenging **Section 33(7)** of the Representation of the People Act, which allows a candidate to fight from two seats at the same time.
- As per the law, a person can contest elections for the same office from two constituencies simultaneously.
- **Section 70** of the Act specifies that a person who wins on both seats can hold one seat only.
- In 2004, the CEC had urged the Centre for amend the Act to provide that a person cannot contest from more than one constituency for the same office simultaneously.

Issues raised by the petitioner:

When a candidate contests from two seats, it is imperative that he has to vacate one of the two seats, if he wins both.

- The financial burden on the public exchequer, government manpower and other resources for holding a by-election against the resultant vacancy.
- It is also an injustice to the voters of the constituency which the candidate is quitting from.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/election-commission-against-same-candidate-contesting-from-two-seats-4978721/>

NIRF rankings 2018

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Key pointers:

- The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) has recently announced the National Institution Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2018 rankings for higher education institutes.
- The Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, topped the overall rankings and also secured the top position in the best university category. IIT Madras secured the second place followed by IIT Bombay and IIT Kharagpur.
- The rankings, according to the report was released under nine categories: Overall, universities, engineering, colleges, management, pharmacy, medical, architecture, and law.

- The NIRF also added several new criteria such as total budget and its utilisation, combined metric for quality of publications, university examinations and how many graduating students admitted into top institutions.

Article link: <http://indianexpress.com/article/education/top-25-medical-colleges-in-india-nirf-ranking-2018-aiims-delhi-neet-5122142/>

10 GW of wind power by 2022

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Energy security

Key pointers:

- The Centre is looking to boost the country's renewable energy footprint through offshore wind energy projects.
- The first bid for setting up an offshore wind project in Tuticorin will come this year.
- The government is expecting to have 10 GW of installed offshore wind power generation by 2022

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23439375.ece>

5.62 Lakh Indians affected by FB data leakage

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Issues related to governance

Key pointers:

- Facebook has said that 5.62 lakh Indians were 'potentially affected' in the episode involving UK-based data miner Cambridge Analytica.
- Only 335 people in the country had installed the application that leaked information to CA. This corresponded to 0.1 per cent of the app's worldwide installations.
- The data-breach episode had sparked a furore in India, with Law and IT Minister warning the social media giant of stringent action for any attempt to influence Indian elections through data theft.
- The government sent Zuckerberg a show-cause notice on March 28, asking if the company, or its related or downstream agencies, utilised Facebook data to manipulate the Indian electoral process.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/article23449579.ece>

Maharashtra Project for Climate Resilient Agriculture: WB to provide loan

Part of: Mains GS Paper II,III- Key interventions by the government, Environment conservation

Key pointers:

- The World Bank has approved a Rs. 2,700-crore loan to improve water harvesting structures and adopt climate resilient agricultural practices in the water-starved Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra.
- The multilateral funding agency signed an agreement with the Centre and the Maharashtra government for a 30-year long loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which will be used to improve water availability in rain-fed areas in these regions, an official release said.
- Called Maharashtra Project for Climate Resilient Agriculture, the project is said to benefit seven million people, mainly small and marginal farmers, in over 5,100 villages in 15 climate vulnerable districts in these two regions.
- The project is expected to take a series of measures at the farm and watershed level. It will scale up climate-resilient technologies such as micro irrigation systems, expand surface water storage and facilitate aquifer recharge, which is expected to directly contribute to a more efficient use of scarce water resources. Besides, it will encourage farmers to adopt seeds of short-duration, and drought and heat-resistant crops so that farmers face lesser risk of climate-related crop failure.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-others/tp-states/article23461969.ece>

Declining population of the Great Indian Bustard

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Environment, Conservation

Key pointers:

- The global population of the GIB plummeted from 1,300 in the 1970s to a mere 300 between 2011-12.
- Rajasthan and Abdasa (Kutch, Gujarat) are the last remaining abodes of the GIB.

- Apart from power lines (high voltage ones, running above the ground) and loss of grassland are the reasons behind the decline.

Loss of grassland — the habitat of the GIB — is primary cause:

- There is unhindered grazing and installing of windmills and power stations on grasslands, thereby encroaching upon the breeding and wintering ground of the GIB.
- Large parcels of grassland are converted to agricultural land.
- The changing agricultural pattern that is moving away from traditional crops is another reason. With the disappearance of the traditional Bajra and Jowar crops, whose by-products served as fodder, their food has been on the decline. An increase in the use of pesticides has further depleted the population of insects like the beetle, which the GIB and other birds feed on.

About the GIB:

- The GIB is a heavy bird, weighing 15-16 kg.
- The GIB is a *flagship species of the grassland*; it determines the health of the grasslands, on which many other species of birds and animals, and even the dairy industry is dependent on.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23461911.ece>

Indian are averse to adopt differently-abled children

Part of: Mains GS Paper I- Social issues

Key pointers:

- For every Indian parent who adopts a differently-abled child there are at least seven foreigners who adopt such children from India after they fail to find a family in the country.
- The latest data shared by the apex body for adoption in the country — Child Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) — reveals that domestic adoptions of children with special needs has fallen with every passing year. At the same time, foreigners adopting children with a physical deformity or an ailment rose by 50% last year alone.
- As per law, efforts have to be made to place a child within India first, and only when a child is not accepted by Indian applicants is he or she referred to foreigners. As a result, overseas applicants are mostly referred differently-abled children.

- The huge gap can be attributed to differences in cultural attitudes towards disabilities.
- While better social security abroad helps families adopt a child with disabilities, there is also a need to look within. In India, there are issues related to schooling, access to public spaces, and employment opportunities. While all these factors do contribute to parents in India not opting for differently-abled children, the primary reason is attitude towards them.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/indians-averse-to-adopting-children-with-special-needs/article23476393.ece>

Maritime trade to use electronic mode

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- The government has made the use of e-Invoices, e-Payments and e-Delivery orders mandatory across the maritime trade as it seeks to push digitisation of trade processes to improve the ease of doing business.
- Stakeholders across major ports (owned by the Central government) and terminals therein, private ports, private terminals, container freight stations (CFS) and inland container depots (ICD) have been directed to use e-Invoices, e-Payments and e-Delivery orders.
- The government has also directed stakeholders to use the **Port Community System (PCS)**, a centralised web-based message exchange platform for the Indian maritime community run by the Indian Ports Association (IPA), to exchange the documents.
- The move will help improve the turnaround time of shipments, bringing it down to a couple of hours.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/article23486806.ece>

'Prompt Corrective Action' Framework for RRBs

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Indian Economy

Key pointers:

- The National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) has come out with a 'Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework' framework for regional rural banks (RRBs).

- The framework is aimed at enabling RRBs that fail to meet prudential requirements relating to capital adequacy, net non-performing assets (NNPAs) and return on assets (ROA) to take self-corrective action to arrest further deterioration in their financial position.
- The PCA will be invoked if RRBs breach trigger points on three parameters: capital to risk-weighted assets (CRAR) ratio, assets (NPAs), and profitability (ROA).
- The PCA framework will be implemented based on the findings of Nabard's inspection with reference to RRBs' FY2019 financial performance.

About RRBs:

- RRBs are jointly owned by the Central government, the State government concerned and sponsor (usually public sector) bank with the issued capital shared in the proportion of 50 percent, 15 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively.
- As at end-March 2017, there were 56 RRBs.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/article23486807.ece>

The NITI NE Forum

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Inclusive development

Major proposals:

- Providing air connectivity between various State capitals of the North-Eastern States.
- Inclusion of Bangladesh in India's 'Act East' policy.
- Imparting education and job skills to English-speaking youth.
- Bringing about wholesome economic development of the region.

The first-ever meeting of NITI NE Forum held here on Tuesday.

About the forum:

- The forum, set up at the instance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February, has been given the task of identifying constraints that hamper socio-economic development of India's most neglected region and streamlining resources available for its growth.
- Set up under the policy think-tank NITI Aayog, the forum would work closely with the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and the North Eastern Council and have senior bureaucrats from the States and the Centre, policy makers, and other experts as members.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23498562.ece>

'Project Dhoop'

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions in key sectors

Key pointers:

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has launched 'Project Dhoop'.
- An initiative aimed at shifting the school assembly time to noon to ensure maximum absorption of Vitamin D in students through natural sunlight.
- The schools across the country have been sent advisories asking them to hold daily assembly between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.
- "Project Dhoop's Noon Assembly is an innovative and effective concept to ensure that school students get adequate Vitamin D through sunlight, while also opting to choose food products like milk and edible oils that are fortified with Vitamins A and D.

Background:

Studies have shown that over 90 per cent of boys and girls across the country were deficient in Vitamin D while the number ranged between 90-97 per cent for school children in Delhi.

Article link: http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/fssai-launches-initiative-to-address-vitamin-d-deficiency-118040901071_1.html

Government to ban e-cigarettes soon

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government intervention in important sectors

Key pointers:

- The Centre has informed the Delhi High Court that it is in the process of issuing guidelines to ban the manufacture, import, sale and any kind of trade in e-cigarettes, dubbing it a “new emerging threat”.
- Terming e-cigarettes or Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems “addictive” and targeted at young smokers, the Health Ministry said the decision has been taken in the larger interest of public health.

- Though there are no specific guidelines to deal with e-cigarettes, several State governments and Union Territories have taken steps to prohibit it.

Issues:

- The chief constituent of e-cigarettes was nicotine, which is addictive.
- It also has a high level of toxicity and can lead to development of cardiovascular diseases, lung diseases, have adverse effect on the immune and gastrointestinal systems, and raise the risk of miscarriage in pregnant women.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/centre-to-snuff-out-toxic-e-cigarettes/article23518979.ece>

Navigation satellite IRNSS-1I- Part of NavIC

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Science & Technology

Key pointers:

- Navigation satellite IRNSS-1I was flown into space from Sriharikota space pad.
- The 1,425-kg satellite will shortly become the eighth satellite to join the NavIC constellation of Indian regional navigation satellites.
- The launch completes the first phase of the constellation

NavIC:

- NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation), dubbed India's own GPS, has been designed to provide precise information on position, navigation and time related to objects or people.
- The eight satellites have a civilian and restricted military/security application to aid security and disaster management and fleet monitoring on land, air and sea.
- The NavIC constellation will help make innovative applications for the entire community of position-based services, especially the under- served and un-served.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/irns-1i-to-enrich-navigation-fleet/article23518583.ece>

WHO's and UNICEF's directive on breastfeeding

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Key interventions in health sector

Key pointers:

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has issued a new 10-step guidance to increase support for breastfeeding in health facilities that provide maternity and newborn services, which provide the immediate health system platform to help mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour and breastfeed exclusively for six months.
- Breastfeeding all babies for the first 2 years would save the lives of more than 8,20,000 children under age 5 annually, noted a release issued by the WHO.
- The guidelines describe how hospitals should have a written breastfeeding policy in place, required staff competencies, and antenatal and post-birth care, including breastfeeding support for mothers.
- It also recommends limited use of breast milk substitutes, rooming-in, responsive feeding, educating parents on the use of bottles and pacifiers, and support when mothers and babies are discharged from hospital.
- Breastfeeding saves lives. Its benefits help keep babies healthy in their first days and last well into adulthood.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/who-directives-call-for-support-for-breastfeeding/article23518591.ece>

Economic Freedom Index

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Governance

Key pointers:

- India has jumped 13 places in the last one year to be at 130th spot in the latest annual Index of Economic Freedom released by a top American think-tank- The Heritage Foundation, an American conservative public policy think-tank based in Washington.
- In 2017, India with a score of 52.6 points was ranked at 143 among 180 countries, two spots below neighbour Pakistan, according to the Index of Economic Freedom.
- India's economic freedom score is 54.5, making its economy the 130th freest in the 2018 Index.
- The overall score has increased, led by improvements in judicial effectiveness, business freedom, government integrity, and fiscal health.
- India is ranked 30th among 43 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages.

- Economic liberalisation measures, including industrial deregulation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises and reduced controls on foreign trade and investment, that began in the early 1990s, accelerated growth.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-climbs-13-spots-to-130-in-economic-freedom-index/article23511379.ece>

Districts under LWE brought down to 30

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Governance, Internal Security

Key pointers:

- In a big development, the government has announced that 44 districts have been taken out of the list of Naxalism-affected areas. Here, the Naxal presence has either been entirely uprooted or restricted to minimal.
- Now, most of the left-wing extremism is restricted to just 30 worst-hit districts.
- The announcement was made by the home ministry saying that the forces have been able to reduce the geographical spread of Naxalism-related violence significantly in the last four years thanks to a multi-pronged strategy that involves security and development-related measures.
- The anti-Naxal policy has focussed on zero tolerance towards violence as well as massive efforts to bring in development in affected areas like new roads, bridges, and telephone towers to make the lives of the poor and the vulnerable easier.

The SRE scheme:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs had earlier listed 106 districts in 10 states as LWE-affected districts.
- These districts came under the purview of the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme that has been formulated for the purpose of reimbursement of security-related expenditure like transportation, communication, the hiring of vehicles, stipend to surrendered Maoists, construction of infrastructure for forces etc.
- Such a categorisation helps in focused deployment security as well as development-related resources.

Recent survey:

- The initially-designated 106 SRE districts increased to 126 over the last few years due to a number of them being carved into smaller districts.

- The MHA recently carried out an extensive exercise to review the LWE-affected districts so as to ensure optimal deployment of forces and resources in these areas keeping in mind changed ground reality.
- It is part of this exercise that 44 districts have been excluded from the SRE list and 8 new added. Now, the total number of SRE districts stands at 90. Also, the count of worst LWE-hit districts has got reduced to 30 from 35.

Article link: http://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/naxal-influence-down-as-govt-removes-44-districts-from-lwe-affected-list/217767?utm_source=inshorts&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=fullarticle

Sustaining seafood exports to EU

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Governance, Internal Security

Key pointers:

- To ensure continued demand for seafood from the European Union, India will showcase the new measures implemented by it to improve vigilance and testing to assure the bloc that all steps were being taken to ensure that consignments meet the required quality standards. The EU is one of India's top buyers of shrimps.
- Information on the traceability software for seafood has been implemented and new methods have been put in place to carry out inspections.

Background:

- The EU has expressed its dissatisfaction with exports from India by tightening its rules on inspections and black-listing.
- India's marine food exporters have been arguing that the EU's decision to increase the sample size from 10 per cent to 50 per cent for testing the seafood consignments from India, while keeping it at 10 per cent for other countries such as Vietnam and Bangladesh was unfair.

The EU accounts for about 18 per cent of marine exports from India with Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain being among the top buyers.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23566902.ece>

Law Commission recommends holding of simultaneous elections

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Indian polity

Key pointers:

Key recommendations

- The leader of the majority party be elected as PM or the CM by the entire House (Lok Sabha or Assembly) for stability
- In case a government falls mid-term, the term of the new government would be for the remaining period only
- A no-confidence motion against the government should be followed by a confidence motion



Pic credits: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article23579189.ece/alternates/FREE_660/TH17-SC-SIMULTAGBP3QQSTR1.jpg

- A draft white paper released by the Law Commission of India recommends holding of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, possibly in 2019.
- It suggests amending the Constitution, Representation of the People Act of 1951 and the Rules of Procedure of the Lok Sabha and Assemblies, to realise this objective.
- The commission was headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice B.S. Chauhan.
- The commission says simultaneous elections were held in the country during the first two decades after Independence up to 1967. Dissolution of certain Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 followed by the dissolution of the Lok Sabha led to the “disruption of the conduct of simultaneous elections.”

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/law-commission-favours-simultaneous-elections/article23579190.ece>

India-Sweden: PM's visit to Sweden

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Swedish counterpart has agreed upon a joint action plan (JAP) for both countries to take forward a wide range of initiatives in defence, trade and investment, counterterrorism, renewable energy, smart cities, women's skill development, space and science and healthcare.
- Characterising the JAP as a "win-win partnership" for New Delhi and Stockholm, Mr. Modi underscored the critical role of the defence sector and security initiatives as a pillar of the bilateral relationship.
- On counterterrorism, Mr. Modi and Mr. Löfven emphasised that the global counterterrorism legal framework should be regularly updated to address the changing threat of terrorism with strength.
- Under the Sweden-India Innovation Partnership for a Sustainable Future, the Swedish government will kick start Innovation Partnership by providing up to 50 million Swedish kronor (over \$59 million) for innovation cooperation in the field of smart cities and sustainability.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/india-sweden-agree-upon-win-win-joint-action-plan/article23579112.ece>

Kaladan Multimodal Project: Ongoing work

Part of: Mains GS Paper II, III- International relations, Infrastructure

Key pointers:

- After years of delay, India has finally kicked off the construction of the 109-km road project that connects Paletwa river terminal to Zorinpui on the Mizoram border in Myanmar, as part of the \$484-million Kaladan Multimodal project.
- The Rs. 1,600-crore road project passes through dense forests and hilly areas.
- On completion, the project will help connect Mizoram with the Sittwe Port in Rakhine State of Myanmar.
- India has already completed the rest of the Kaladan project work in Myanmar. This includes the construction of the Sittwe Port on Lakadan river mouth in Rakhine, construction of a river terminal 158 upstream at Paletwa and dredging of the Kaladan river.
- On the Indian side, work is on to extend the Aizawl-Saiha National Highway to the international border at Zorinpui. Also, a Rs. 6,000-crore project is under way for four-laning the 300-km highway from Myanmar border to Aizawl to ensure the faster movement of goods.

- Completion of the Paletwa-Zorinpui road holds the key to operationalise the Kaladan multi-modal project.

Article **link:** <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23579922.ece>

Task force on natural gas: India and US

Part of: Mains GS Paper II, III- International relations, Energy security

Key pointers:

- India and the US has announced the formation of a task force on natural gas aimed at increasing the share of gas in India's primary energy mix.
- Under the US-India Energy Partnership, the US and India will pursue four primary pillars of cooperation. These are oil and gas, power and energy efficiency, renewable energy and sustainable growth, and coal.
- The newly set up task force will have a team of US and Indian industry experts with a mandate to propose, develop, and convey, innovative policy recommendations to Government of India in support of its vision for natural gas in the economy of India.
- The work of the task force is expected to advance the strategic and economic interests of both the nations.

Article **link:** <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23579920.ece>

Poshan Abhiyaan to cover 550 districts

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions

Key pointers:

- The government has extended its ambitious Poshan Abhiyaan to 235 additional districts in its second phase taking the total of districts covered by the national nutrition mission so far to 550 districts.
- The additional districts to be covered during the current financial year were decided on the basis of the level of stunting prevalent in district as well as to ensure those districts affected

by left wing extremism and those declared aspirational districts by NITI Aayog left out in the first phase covered.

About the mission:

- The Rs. 9,000-crore mission will strive to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, and low birth weight by 2 per cent and anaemia (*among* young children, women and adolescent girls) by 3 per cent annually over the three-year mission period.
- Anganwadi supervisors have been roped in for the mission.
- The focus of the Abhiyaan is on the first 1000 days of the child and preventive care for adolescent girls, women and mothers.
- Home-based Care for Young Child (HBYC) would be a crucial component of the Abhiyaan.
- In HBYC, ASHAs supported by Anganwadi workers will visit the homes of children aged between 3 to 15 months and sensitise mothers on energy density and diet of child, he said.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23597828.ece>

Renewable Energy Sector: Missed the target again

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Energy Security

Key pointers:

- The renewable energy sector has missed its capacity addition target for the second year in a row.
- Against the target of 14,450 MW for 2017-18, the new capacity addition from all major segments stood at 11,754 MW, effectively *achieving only 81 per cent of the target for the year ended March 31*.
- As of March 31, the total grid-interactive installed capacity in the renewable energy sector stood at 69,022 MW.

Statistics:

- Solar (ground-mounted) saw new capacity addition of about 9,010 MW, marginally higher than the the target of 9,000 MW.
- The rooftop solar segment added only 353 MW against the target of 1,000 MW.
- New bio-power capacity addition stood at 519 MW against the target of 340 MW.
- Small hydro power added a new capacity of 106 MW, higher than the target of 100 MW.

- FY18 proved to be a challenging year for wind power, with the sector adding one of the lowest annual capacities in the recent years. Against the target of 4,000 MW, this segment added just 1,766 MW.

Article link: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/article23597785.ece>

Key recommendations of Law Commission on BCCI

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions

Key pointers:

Private club or public authority?

Given its financial status and commercial success, the BCCI has been the envy of the national bodies of other sports. But it is also losing its private character over the years

- Registered under T.N. Societies Registration Act, it was a charitable organisation under Section 12A of the Income Tax Act. This status was withdrawn in December 2009, with effect from June 2006
- Draft 'National Sports Development Bill, 2013' favoured all national sports federations being treated as 'public authorities' under the Right to Information Act



- The then Sports Minister informed Lok Sabha that govt. treats BCCI as a national sports federation as it approves its events
- After the IPL spot fixing controversy, the Supreme Court appointed Lodha Committee to suggest reforms in the BCCI
- The Committee mooted sweeping reforms in board's structure, functioning
- While ruling in 2016 that the BCCI was not 'State' under Article 12, the SC said it was amenable to writ jurisdiction as it performed 'public functions'
- In Jan. 2017, the SC appointed a four-member committee to run the BCCI
- In June 2017, the CIC favoured bringing the BCCI under the RTI Act

Pic credit: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article23597123.ece/alternates/FREE_660/th18-LAW-COMMISGU33R10041jpg.jpg

- The board and all its member cricket associations should be brought under the Right to Information law regime.
- The 90-year-old Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) should be declared a public body.
- The board's monopolistic activities, directly and indirectly, affect the fundamental rights of citizens, players, and other functionaries. A private citizen should be able to move the highest court against the BCCI for any violation of his fundamental rights.
- The BCCI exercises 'state-like' powers in the regulation of cricket, and thus, comes under the definition of 'state.'

- The BCCI virtually acts as a National Sports Federation (NSF). The commission recommended that the Ministry website should explicitly mention BCCI in the list of NSFs. This would automatically bring it within the purview of the RTI Act.

Concerns:

- The commission said the board has been “flying under the radar of public scrutiny and encouraged an environment of opacity and non-accountability.”
- It has created “an impression in the minds of the general public that corruption and other forms of malpractices are adversely affecting one of the most popular sports played in India.”

BCCI is a “limb of the state”:

The commission pointed out that-

- The cricket board, as an entity, is permitted de facto by the state to represent the country at the international stage.
- It selects the Indian cricket team. The selected players wear the national colours and are the recipients of Arjuna awards.
- The ICC recognises BCCI as the ‘official’ body representing India.

The Law Commission was led by former Supreme Court judge, Justice B.S. Chauhan.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/make-bcci-a-public-body-law-panel/article23597124.ece>

India-UK: Bilateral meet

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- International relations

Key pointers:

- India and the UK will build on the recommendations of a joint trade review to reduce barriers.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged that there would be no dilution in the importance of the UK to India post-Brexit
- The two sides signed a statement of shared values, emphasising support for a “global outlook and commitment to rules based international system”.
- As part of the bilateral agreement, Indian firms will make investments of about £1 billion in UK.

- Britain and India agreed to forge a new India-UK Trade Partnership, building on the trade review carried out over the past year, focussing on life sciences, IT, food and drink. A UK-India Tech Partnership, and research partnership was also agreed upon.

The joint statement:

- “We share a global outlook and commitment to a rules-based international system that strongly opposes unilateral actions that seek to undermine that system through force or coercion,” said the joint statement from the Prime Ministers.
- It also pledged to work with other countries in the Commonwealth on issues ranging from cybersecurity to plastic pollution and climate change.

The visit is the third bilateral between the two Prime Ministers since 2015, as Britain has sought to emphasise the potential for growth in trade with non-EU partners once Britain leaves the EU.

Article **link:** <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23597829.ece>

Death penalty for rape of girls under 12

Part of: Mains GS Paper I, II- Social issues, Government interventions

Key pointers:

- The Union Cabinet has approved promulgation of an Ordinance to provide death penalty for rapists of girls below 12 years.
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance provides for stringent punishment of a jail term of minimum 20 years or life imprisonment or death for rape of a girl under 12 years.
- In the case of a gang rape of a girl below 12 years, there will be a punishment of life in jail or a death sentence.
- For the crime of a rape of a girl under 16 years, minimum punishment has been increased from 10 years to 20 years, which is expandable to imprisonment for rest of life.
- Minimum punishment in case of rape of women has also been increased from rigorous imprisonment of 7 years to 10 years, extendable to life imprisonment.
- The Ordinance also provides for speedy investigation and trial which needs to be compulsorily completed within two months.

There will also be no provision for anticipatory bail for a person accused of rape or gang rape of a girl under 16 years.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/union-cabinet-approves-ordinance-for-death-penalty-for-rape-of-girls-under-12-years/article23626717.ece?homepage=true>

The lunar "Gateway" Program

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Science & Technology

Key pointers:

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (Nasa) goal of returning to the moon should see a major push in early 2019 with the lunar "Gateway" program.
- The Lunar Orbital Platform-Gateway is Nasa's planned "staging" area intended for studies of the moon and the deep-space environment.
- The Gateway would also further Nasa's goal of another human landing on the moon and will help determine whether water near the surface could be used to manufacture propellant for deep-space missions.
- The moon's gravity could also help a spacecraft reduce the blistering speeds used for six-month voyages back-and-forth to Mars, thus facilitating re-entry to Earth's atmosphere.

Article link: <https://www.livemint.com/Science/k8b7rJBWd79DPyXvqG0DeN/Nasa-lunar-Gateway-space-station-will-soon-begin-construct.html>

The Earth BioGenome Project

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Science & Technology

Key pointers:

- The Earth BioGenome Project (EBP) proposes a detailed genome-sequence draft of every eukaryote species (organisms with a defined nucleus and to which belong all plants and animals).
- There are about eight million eukaryotic species and the authors argue that being able to create their detailed genetic sequences will reveal unexpected, evolutionary connections among the genus, orders and families that make up the so-called Tree of Life.
- The EBP has a 10-year road map and hopes to sequence about 1.5 million eukaryote species in three phases. This exercise needs global collaboration and can have many benefits.
- Sequencing such a large number of organisms will require innovative computation- and storage solutions and the programming acumen of many thousands across the world.

- The Human Genome Project, which involved preparing a blueprint of the sequence of genes that make up humans, gave scientists a way to link networks of genes with disease and well-being, as well as discover unexpected links; for instance, why some women were prone to breast cancer more than others.
- If mining a single species' genes can yield such benefits — at least \$1 trillion to the U.S. alone, according to a 2013 *Nature* study — the bounty from preparing detailed sequences of every species on the earth could be many multiples of that and could benefit the world.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/for-a-digital-library-of-life/article23650279.ece>

New system to measure air quality: Being jointly developed by India, US & Finland

Part of: Mains GS Paper III- Environment, Conservation

Key pointers:

- India is tying up with the United States and Finland to develop a pollution-forecast system that will help anticipate particulate matter (PM) levels at least two days in advance and at a greater resolution than what is possible now.
- The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) will be coordinating this exercise.
- Currently, the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), run out of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, serves as the apex forecaster of pollution trends in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Ahmedabad. It generates a likely air quality profile, a day in advance, for these cities. IITM is an organisation under the MoES.
- The new system will use a different modelling approach as well as computational techniques from that employed in the SAFAR model.

Recently, the Union Environment Ministry released a draft of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) that aims to improve air quality monitoring in India by increasing the number of pollution monitoring stations and, incorporating it into a pollution forecast system.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/new-system-to-measure-air-quality/article23664041.ece>

Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0

Part of: Mains GS Paper II- Government interventions

Key pointers:

- The second stage of the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is set to take off with a much wider spread than its first stage.
- It is a scheme of the Centre aimed at making higher education institutions provide solutions for problems of villages.
- While just 143 premier institutions like IITs and NITs took part in the first stage, UBA 2.0 will see open and much wider participation from many higher educational institutions.
- Both technical and non-technical institutions have been invited to build systems in villages as per their strengths.
- The idea is to have a coordinated approach where the government and institutions work together to facilitate rural development.
- It is expected to be a two-way learning process, where institutions share their knowledge with villages and also learn from the wisdom and commonsense of rural folk.
- The key points include helping villages achieve 100% school results, creating 25 jobs each in four sectors in each village where work would take place, increasing rural incomes, providing drinking water and sanitation to villages, disposing village garbage, among other things.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/unnat-bharat-abhiyan-of-mhrd-gets-wider-spread/article23674360.ece>

NITI Aayog and ITC Ltd to strengthen farming systems in collaboration

Part of: Mains GS Paper II, III- Government interventions, Indian agriculture

Key pointers:

- NITI Aayog and ITC Ltd will collaborate in the agriculture and allied sectors in order to strengthen farming systems across 25 aspirational districts.
- Launched by the Prime Minister in January, the 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme aims to improve performance of these districts. The 25 aspirational districts cover Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Jharkhand.
- ITC will promote best practices and technologies, set-up demonstration farms and also create master trainers from government extension workers.

Master trainers will be created at the block level. The company will also work out the logistics to ensure the farmers are trained even at the gram panchayat level.

- NITI Aayog will work in close collaboration with the district administrations and ITC to build capacities.
- In order to ensure implementation, performance review and problem-solving, a Project Management Committee (PMC) at the district level will be set up.
- It is expected that over 2 lakh lead farmers (LF) in 25 districts will be trained as a part of the partnership.

Article **link:** <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23689886.ece>

Khadi: A silent, transformational force in an aspirational India

Part of: Mains GS Paper II, III- Government interventions, Inclusive growth

Key pointers:

- The Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has chalked out ambitious plans to double the sales of khadi to Rs. 5,000 crore in the next two financial years.
- KVIC has planned to open khadi outlets to promote the products in global markets.
- KVIC has also signed an MoU with NIFT for better design development and training at different khadi institutions.
- In an aspirational India, khadi has emerged a silent, transformational force. It is also a major job creator in Bharat, that is rural India.
- The low-profile, handspun cloth has seen its demand grow among the common people and the corporate world, suddenly witnessing a 34 per cent sales growth.
- The average growth of production in the khadi sector was only 6.24 per cent in the decade 2004-14, which has risen to 26.43 per cent in 2015-17. It is the only sector in the Indian economy to register a double-digit growth in the last three years.

Article **link:** <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/todays-paper/tp-news/article23689879.ece>

All villages in India are now electrified

Part of: Mains GS Paper II, III- Government interventions, Inclusive growth

Key pointers:

- All villages in India have now been electrified, Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The milestone was achieved 12 days ahead of the 1,000-day deadline set by the government on August 15, 2015.
- Leisang in Manipur's Senapati district became the last village to be connected to the national grid.
- As per official data, there were 18,452 villages without electricity when the NDA government took office in May 2014.
- The work of bringing power to India's 597,464 census villages had been undertaken under the government's Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana.
- According to government data, 1,236 villages are uninhabited and 35 have been notified as grazing reserves.

Article link: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/all-villages-electrified-says-pm/article23723577.ece>

